



OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

NO. 64

Price 5 cents

The STRANGEST MYSTERY in the WORLD



The
ARTHUR WESTBROOK
Company
CLEVELAND
U. S. A.

by
"OLD
SLEUTH"



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A Series of
THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES
EVER PUBLISHED

No. 64.

THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A.

Vol. II.

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The Strangest Mystery in the World OR HARRY BRAND'S WINNING PLAY By "OLD SLEUTH."

CHAPTER I.

"It's the strangest mystery in the world!"
Henry Brand, a special detective, was seated in his office when a young man entered, and asked:

"Are you a detective?"

"I sometimes do detective work," was the answer.

"I've got on to something," said Harry's visitor; and he added the words recorded in our opening chapter, "It's the strangest mystery in the world!"

"Give me an account of the strangest mystery in the world."

"I know something about you, if you are Henry Brand," said the young man.

"Indeed?"

"Yes. My father saw your name in the paper, and he remarked, 'I wonder if that is a son of my old friend Henry Brand, and if he is, I wonder how it is he is a detective. He is a descendant of one of our old Knickerbocker families, and ought to be as rich as Crescas.'"

"Never mind about the old Knickerbocker family," said Harry. "Tell me about the strangest mystery in the world."

"That's all right; but I wish to tell you why I came to you, and I want you to promise that you will keep this affair between ourselves."

"I will promise to keep it between ourselves unless compelled, as a professional duty, to open up the facts."

"That will do."

"What is your name?" demanded the detective.

"My name is Jack Sheppard."

"A pretty good name," laughed the detective.

"Oh, I've read the story of Jack Sheppard; but I do not come of that family."

"That's all right; I did not suspect that you did. But how about the mystery?"

The youth who had come to the detective was not more than seventeen or eighteen.

"I live way up-town," said the visitor. "Our place runs down to the river shore, and at the foot of the road, down by the river, stands a little old frame house."

The detective made some inquiries, and said:

"I know the house, and I suppose it's a ghost story you are about to tell me."

"Not exactly a ghost story, but something like it. About a year ago, a strange-looking man came to live in that house. I think he is a German. He looks like a professor. He seldom goes out, and he keeps his windows closed tight most of the time, and he lives alone. He never has any visitors, and I never saw any one else about the house but once."

"And then you saw a ghost, I suppose?"

"Well, she may be a ghost now," came the answer.

Henry Brand was an odd sort of a character. As has been intimated, he was a descendant of a once well-known old New York family. The branch of the family to which he be-

longed had always been wealthy, and when our hero was about ten years of age, his father left New York and settled in Europe. The only member of the family known to have returned was our hero.

He had returned to New York ten years subsequent to his father's departure, and had been in New York about ten years at the time of the opening of our narrative. Upon his return he had failed to renew any of the acquaintances of his father's family, and had led a sort of reserved and mysterious existence.

At the age of twenty-three he secured an appointment on the police force, and after a few years' service as patrolman and roundsman, he had been promoted to the detective force, having gained his promotion through the exhibition of special qualifications and fitness for the position.

While on the force he had earned the *sobriquet* of Knickerbocker Harry, owing to the fact that it became known that he was a descendant of the early Dutch settlers in New York. He had been acting as a secret special for two or three years when the incidents occurred that we are about to record.

The detective pondered a little after the young man's declaration, "She may be a ghost now," and then said:

"Go on and tell me all about it."

"You see," said Jack, "I was deeply interested in the old man. I thought there was a mystery about him, and I used to lay around and watch on the sly; and one night—it was very warm—I got up from my bed and went to sit at the open window, and while sitting there I saw some one leave the little frame house. It was a clear, starlight night, and it struck me that it was the figure of the old professor."

"My curiosity was at once aroused, and I put on my clothes and stole out of the house. I had seen the old man go down toward the shore. I got out pretty quick, and ran across our lawn down toward the river, and, at the risk of breaking my neck, clambered down the embankment, and for a moment or two I could see nothing of the man I was trailing.

"I walked along, and soon espied the figure of the man I was shadowing. So I just lay low, and watched, and soon discovered that he was going to take a swim. I waited until he had disrobed and went into the water, and then I gradually crept up to the place where he had cast his clothing. I had seen something that aroused my suspicions, and when I saw him swim far out into the stream, I crept right up to where his clothes were, and made a most startling discovery."

There followed a pause, and the detective, after an interval, asked:

"What did you discover?"

"I told you the tenant in the old frame house was an old man—a very old man!"

"Yes."

"Well, here comes in the first part of the mystery. He is not an old man, but a young man disguised to represent an old man."

"How did you find it out?"

"Well, you see, the man is a great swimmer, and he went far

out toward the middle of the river; and then, as I said, I crept up and looked at his clothes, and I found a wig and several other articles that indicated plainly enough that he was disguised."

"The old fellow may be bald-headed man."

"That's all right; but I did not accept the discovery of the wig as proof positive, and I made up my mind to fully satisfy myself; so I crawled behind a rock, at the risk of discovery, and again I lay low. The man took a good, long swim, but finally came in to the shore; and as he rose to wade out, I saw a strong-limbed, erect young man with a head of short-cropped black hair. I saw him resume his clothing, and finally adjust his wig; and as he walked back toward his cottage, he resumed the tottering step of an old man, while at the time he waded from the water he walked erect and with the vigor of a man of twenty."

The detective pondered, and finally said:

"The circumstances are rather singular, but not so strangely mysterious as you appear to think."

"Why not?"

"The man may be some crank. It is possible he may be a thief. We will watch him, anyhow."

"Ahl but I have not told you all the story yet."

"Let me hear it all."

"I did not confide my discovery to any one, but I determined to watch. I made up my mind that something was wrong, and I am satisfied the man is not a thief."

"What leads you to the conclusion?"

"I've watched his house closely, day and night. He hardly ever goes forth, day or night. I've never seen him go forth in the day-time, except a few times to the stores in the vicinity, and he returns almost immediately. He never goes forth at night, except to bathe. If he was a thief, he would go forth!"

"That does not follow. He may be hiding from the police."

"I thought of that; but I do not believe he is hiding from the police, because there is another mystery surrounding the affair."

"Ahl you have not told me of that."

"No. You see, I watched him, and when he went to bathe, I would take up a position on the bank overhead, and keep my eye on him."

"Do you think he ever discovered you?"

"It struck me that one night he did have a suspicion that some one was around."

"Did he suspect your identity?"

"I can not tell; but for a week I saw nothing of him, and then again one night he came forth and went and took his usual bath. I made up my mind to change my tactics, and instead of following to watch him, I determined to take a peep around his house. I did so, and made a second very singular discovery. I told you I had never seen any one around the house but the old man.

"I never did until the other night, and then I made a second startling discovery in this strange and mysterious affair."

"I saw a strange man enter the water, and then I ran back to his house, and I walked around it, when I saw a light flash from one of the windows, and as quickly the light died out. Then the thought came to me that the man was not the sole occupant of the house."

"If it had been a steady light, I should not have thought so much about it; but when I recognized that the flash had come and gone, then my suspicions were aroused, and I tried to solve the mystery; but all was darkness, and so continued after the one quick, bright flash, and finally I was compelled to steal away. But the next night I was on hand again, and I took up a position directly opposite the window from which the flash of light had come."

"I lay waiting and watching for some time, and had reached the conclusion that my vigil was to meet with no reward, when suddenly there came a flash of light, and I saw a figure."

"Was it a man or woman?"

"It was the face and form of a beautiful young girl that I saw."

"Well," remarked the detective, "there is a smack of romance in your narrative after all."

"There is something more than romance."

"What?"

"Tragedy. Yes, there are tragic circumstances involved. Yes, sir; it is a tragic mystery that must be cleared up."

"I reckon your imagination has been leading you along."

"You think so. You don't know me very well. I tell you there is some terrible mystery connected with the house and its occupant."

"You never saw the beautiful girl but that once, I suppose?"

"You suppose wrong. I went and lay around several nights, and once again I caught a glimpse of her face, and the second time I had a good look at her. She was young and wondrously beautiful."

"You say she was young and wondrously beautiful? You mean she is young and wondrously beautiful?"

"No; I measured my words."

"And what do you mean—did you see her again?"

"Yes; I saw her in her coffin!"

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Henry Brand heard the young lad's last statement, as recorded at the close of our preceding chapter, he gave a little start, and said:

"I reckon, young man, you have been dreaming."

"You think so, eh? You can verify what I've said, for she lies in her coffin at this moment as calm and still and beautiful as a dead angel."

"Just go on with your narrative."

"After I saw the young lady at the window, I determined to

speak with her. Between you and me, it came over me that there was something wrong."

"The whole affair was mysterious, and I made up my mind to get into that house at all hazards, and I lay around watching for a chance, and it came in a most remarkable manner. Last night I was on the watch, and I saw the professor, as I call him, and another man leave the house."

"When I saw the two men leave the house, it struck me at first that one of the men was a blind man, as the old professor was leading him, and he did so very carefully."

"As they walked away, I resolved to follow them and get on to the scheme. I did, and made a third very singular and startling discovery. I made out the fact that the man the professor was leading was not a blind man, but that he was blindfolded."

"By gosh!" remarked the detective, "it is a strange narrative you are telling, if it is the truth. And you say the man was blindfolded?"

"Yes."

"How far did you follow them?"

"Not far. My game was to get into the house and interview the young lady."

"Did you succeed?"

"I did. Yes, I returned to the house, and, as I flyer, tried the door. It was unlocked, and I entered without difficulty. I had provided myself with a masked lantern. I got into the house, and with a stealthy step moved along the narrow hall until I came to a door opening off the hall at the extreme rear. I did not draw the shield of my lantern, but moved slowly into the room, and stole forward, when suddenly I became conscious of something ahead of me. At first I thought it was a bedstead. I stood a moment, and considered, and then drew my lantern, slipped the mask, and held a sight that froze the blood around my heart."

The young man paused, and after an instant the detective asked:

"What was it you beheld?"

"A coffin raised on two rests."

The detective was deeply interested, and, at the same time, he closely scrutinized the narrator's face.

The story seemed so incredible, a suspicion flashed through our hero's mind that possibly he was listening to the wild, weird tale of a lunatic, or the fictitious creation of a young joker, and he said:

"If I discover that you are playing a trick on me, young man, it will go hard with you."

"I am not playing a trick on you."

"What did you see in the coffin?"

"The dead face of the girl I had seen at the window. Yes, there she lay cold in death, but as beautiful as when in life."

"And you are sure the dead girl was the same beautiful creature you saw at the window?"

"Yes; it was the same face, and she lay there—oh, so beautiful!"

"Are you sure she was dead?"

"Yes. I placed my hand on her forehead, and it was cold as ice."

Again the detective fixed his eyes on the narrator, eyed him keenly and even sternly, and said:

"I fear you are foolish enough to attempt to play a trick on me."

"On my honor, I am telling you the truth."

"See here; you are certain you had a good view of the young girl's face when you saw her alive?"

"I did."

"Under what circumstances?"

"She stood at the window and held a light in her hand. She pressed her face against the window as though looking for some one without."

"Under those circumstances you could not discern her features well enough to identify her."

"I was close under the window, and I did see her face."

"I fear you are mistaken."

"I am not. I saw her twice, and the last time I did see her features clearly, and they were fixed upon my memory."

A moment the detective meditated. He considered that indeed he was listening to a very strange and startling narrative.

"What do you suspect?" asked Henry.

"Wait until I finish my narrative. I was still looking at the dead face, when I heard a step outside. I discerned that the professor had returned, and I realized my peril. I knew he intended to keep his secret, and would deal roughly with any one whom he found in the house."

"I had not a moment to spare. I ran to the hall and dodged down to the cellar, and I heard the man enter. I heard his step tramping overhead in the room above, and I tell you I was scared."

"At length the walking overhead ceased, and for quite a time I lay still. Finally my courage returned, and I determined to get out of that place. I cautiously slid the mask of my lantern and looked around, and another startling discovery came under my glance."

"What did you discover?" asked Henry Brand.

"An open grave," came the answer. "Yes; a new-made grave, excavated right in the center of the cellar."

After a few minutes' thought, the detective said:

"Jack, if you are telling me the truth, these are really very strange incidents."

"I am telling you the truth."

"How did you get out of the cellar?"

"Oh, I got out easy enough. Yes, and you and I can get into the house through the same opening by which I escaped. There is a cellar window which has been boarded up; it works on hinges; and I unfastened it so that I could leave at my leisure, and when I

had secured a course for escape, I was not in such a hurry to get out. I looked all around the cellar."

"Did you make any other discoveries?"

"No; but one thing is certain: the man means to bury the girl in the cellar."

"And you saw him lead a blindfolded man away?"

"Yes."

"Now, Jack, what do you suspect? Do you think the girl was murdered?"

The youth did not make any answer.

"How long ago was it since you saw her alive?"

"About five nights ago."

"You did not see her after the night you have mentioned?"

"No."

"Did you look for blood stains?"

"No."

"Were the features of the dead girl distorted?"

"No."

"Were they at all attenuated?"

"No. She looked as beautiful as in life, only that her eyes were closed, her face was pale as marble, and she was as cold as ice."

"Jack, I am glad you came to me."

"I came to you because my father said he thought he had known your father."

"Have you said anything to any one as to your strange discoveries?"

"I have not spoken to a living soul but you concerning the strange affair."

"You must promise me not to say a word to a living soul."

"I will be as silent as the girl in the coffin."

"And you had better not attempt to enter the house again."

"I will follow your advice from this time out."

"Do not watch the professor."

"Why not?"

"He may discover that he is under surveillance, and I want to lay to him and take him unawares."

"That's all right; but you must not drop me out of this affair."

"No; I will take you into my confidence as you have taken me into yours. Have you any more facts to relate?"

"No; and now tell me what you think of it all."

"I haven't had time to think, Jack. As it stands, on your statement, it seems as though we had indeed struck upon some very strange and tragic mystery; but we can not tell. It may all be explained in the most reasonably natural manner."

"I think not, sir. The fact that the professor is passing himself off for an old man, when he is a young and vigorous fellow, his leading a blindfolded man to and from his house, and the dead girl and the grave in the cellar, all these incidents are very strange."

"Yes; they are indeed."

"He must have had that beautiful girl concealed in that house for almost a year."

"It is possible."

"There is something very strange about that."

"There is, and we will go to the bottom of the mystery, Jack. And now mark my words, until you hear from me again do not watch the place. Do not be seen around there at all, and whatever you may come across do not attempt to investigate, but just report to me. We have a very delicate job on hand."

The two held some further talk. The detective instructed Jack as to his movements, and the two separated. When left alone, the detective sat lost in deep thought for a long time, and finally he muttered:

"It is possible; but we shall see."

CHAPTER III.

LATE in the afternoon on the same day when the story was related to the detective, an old woman took the cars and rode up-town, and some time later the same old woman might have been seen sitting on the shore near the little frame house. She had been sitting there some time, when a boat came in toward the shore, and a man, who looked like a fisherman, was propelling the skiff.

The boat was run up on the sand, and the man alighted. He did not appear to have seen the old woman; but the latter discovered that he was studying carefully the little frame house.

His actions were covert; but it became evident that he was deeply interested in the old house, or some one connected with it. He remained around for some time, and then, as the shades of evening began to fall, he walked away.

The old woman who had been watching waited a little, and then started to follow the man; but when she ascended the hill from the beach, she could see nothing of him. There was a man walking away, but it was not the fisherman; it was a well-dressed gentleman.

"Halloo! what does this mean?" muttered the old woman. "There has been a transformation, I reckon. It is indeed a great mystery."

There followed a second transformation. The old woman was suddenly transformed into a man, and transformer Number Two started to follow transformer Number One. The latter took a car, and his follower did the same. The two men rode down-town on the same car, and Henry Brand had a good opportunity to study the other fellow's face.

When he alighted from the car, the detective waited to ride but a few steps, and alighted also, with the muttered remark:

"We shall see."

Henry Brand kept upon the man's track for many hours, but failed in gaining any points which he considered of consequence.

At length he started to return to his home, and was walking along, lost in meditation, when he was suddenly overtaken by young Jack Sheppard.

"Halloo, Jack!" said the detective. "You're excited about something."

"Yes, I am."

"What is it?"

"You may say I've disobeyed orders; but the circumstances were peculiar, and I rather think you will justify me."

"Go ahead and tell me the excusing circumstances."

"You told me to haul off from the watch on the professor."

"I did."

"I was not watching him, and was returning to my home early this evening, when I met him, and recognized him."

"What do you mean when you say you recognized him?"

"He had thrown off his disguise, but I recognized him all the same. You see, he has a little blemish in his gait. I noticed that when he came in from bathing. The moment I recognized him, I felt a curiosity to follow him. Did I do wrong?"

"We will wait and hear what you have to tell. It would be bad if he recognized you."

"Oh, he did not recognize me."

"You can not tell about these things. The man may have thrown himself in your way as a test."

"If that had been his purpose he would not have gone on about his business and let me into his secret."

"Let you into his secret?"

"Not his secret exactly; but I got on to his business for the time being."

"Let me hear what you have learned."

"I followed him, and he went to a certain well-known hotel. I followed him in."

"That was risky."

"But I had made up for him. He could not recognize me. I've studied the disguise business a little. I followed him into the great hall of the hotel, and I saw him walking around, peeping here and there, and I made up my mind he was looking for some one, and, as it proved, I was right. He walked around for fully half an hour, when a young man came down-stairs and walked to the bar-room. The professor followed him and I followed also, and I saw the man I was dogging go to the young man and address him, and the two went to a remote corner, sat down, and indulged in a long conversation. The young man to whom he was talking is one of the handsomest young men I ever met, and he has the saddest face I ever beheld, and during the talk I made a discovery."

"Ah! another discovery, eh?"

"Yes. I discovered that the handsome young man hated the professor."

"How could you learn that fact?"

"I could see the savage gleam that occasionally came in his eyes; and it's my idea the young man is the one who was led to the little frame house blindfolded."

"It is possible you are right."

"You may gain his confidence and learn something."

"That is true. We will go at once. Jack, you are a pretty bright fellow."

The two proceeded to the great hotel. They entered the bar-room, and Jack, after glancing around, said:

"There he is!"

The detective looked in the direction indicated, and beheld a very handsome young man. His age was not more than five-and-twenty.

"You can leave him to me now," said the detective.

Jack Sheppard took the hint and walked away, and the detective made up his mind to make the young man's acquaintance. He got close to him, and overheard the young stranger muttering to himself in a sort of incoherent manner. The detective was revolving in his mind a plan to open up an acquaintance, when the stranger rose from his seat and left the room.

Henry followed. The young man passed to the street, and the detective kept upon his track, and saw him walk down Twenty-third Street toward the East River ferry.

The detective was a keen and observant man, and a suspicion flashed through his mind, and he muttered:

"That young fellow has determined upon something desperate. I read it in his eye."

Having reached the end of the street, the young man turned toward down-town, and finally swept to his left, and walked out upon the pier.

The detective walked with a stealthy step, and closed up on the youth. He saw him go to the extreme end of the pier, where he sat down on the string-piece.

Henry had moved to one side, and managed to change his position so as to constantly keep in the youth's rear.

A few moments passed, and again the youth indulged in a soliloquy.

The detective could not overhear all that he said, but he did catch the words:

"I may as well end it all now. Better to die than to go mad."

As he finished the latter remark, he drew a pistol from his pocket, clapped it to his temple, and fired.

As has been intimated, the detective suspected a deadly purpose, and he was on the alert. At the moment the youth drew the pistol, Henry leaped forward, and just at the right instant seized the youth's hand, turned the aim of the gleaming weapon, and as he held his prisoner, he said:

"Well, you are a nice man, I should say."

The youth appeared dazed, and did not make an immediate reply, and the detective demanded:

"Why do you wish to kill yourself?"

"Who are you?" came the question in an agitated voice.

"It does not matter who I am. I certainly was just in time to prevent you from making a fatal mistake."

"It was no mistake."

"It is always a mistake for a man under any circumstances to take his own life."

"But you do not know the circumstances that led me to take my own life."

"I do not care what the circumstances were, it is a fatal error every time. You are my prisoner."

"But you can not arrest me. I have committed no crime. A man can kill himself if he desires to, I reckon."

"Not in this State, my young friend. It is a violation of law for a man to attempt to suicide in this State, and the chances are you will spend a year or so in jail."

"But you will not surrender me to the authorities?"

"I will be compelled to do so."

The young man was silent a moment, but at length said:

"I know I was foolish. I know I did wrong. I was temporarily mad. You will forgive me?"

"My forgiving you will not avail. You must wait and see what the judge has to say after he has heard your story."

"And you will really take me to jail?"

"Why not? You have attempted a crime; you have violated the law."

"But you can not swear I meant to kill myself."

"I can swear as close as you came to succeeding. So now, young man, it's no use; you are my prisoner."

The young man put his hand in his vest-pocket, drew forth a costly watch, and said:

"Here, this is yours. Let me go."

"No, no; that will not do."

"You shall have my diamond studs and ring; they are of great value."

"I am not taking presents under these circumstances."

"And you are determined to surrender me?"

"That is my present purpose."

"If you will not take the presents, let me appeal to your mercy.

Ah! please let me go! I had good reason for wishing to die."

"No man has good reason for taking his own life. It is the deed of a fool or a lunatic. The law takes that view of it, and has prescribed penalty. If you are insane, you must go to an asylum. If it was mere desperation, then you must be punished."

"I am not mad; I am not desperate. You will regret it if you surrender me."

"There is one way you can escape."

"How can I escape?"

"Tell me your story. Let me know your reasons for your rash act."

CHAPTER IV.

THE young man did not make an immediate answer, and after a moment the detective said:

"If you can really satisfy me that you had good reasons for attempting your life, I will let you go, and, what is more, I will become your friend."

"I wish you had been an instant later," said the young man.

"It is strange that a man just entering upon life should desire to kill himself."

"But all the hopes I ever indulged have faded away."

"Yes; they are sunk in a coffin," said the detective.

The young man started back; his face became distorted with agitation; his eyes fairly bulged.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean you had better tell me your story."

"You know something about me?"

"Yes."

"Impossible! No one could know anything about me here in New York."

"Let me see. You were led to a house the other night. You were blindfolded, and when the covering was removed from your face, you stood aghast, gazing at the beautiful face of a dead girl."

It would be impossible to describe the changing expressions that passed over the young man's face.

"Who are you, and how is it you know these facts?" he demanded in a gasping tone.

"I am a detective officer."

"But that is not an explanation."

"I am always on the watch for what is strange and mysterious. Do you know where the house is located to which you were led?"

"No."

"I do."

"And you know Ethel!"

The detective had learned the name of the dead girl, but he was cunning, and said:

"We will not talk about Ethel, we will talk about you."

"This is all very, very strange," muttered the young man.

"What is all very, very strange?"

"That you should know the facts you have mentioned."

"You had better tell me your story."

"No; I can tell you nothing."

"If you do, I may tell you something that will cause you to change your mind. You will not be so anxious to die."

"It is wonderful that you should know about my being taken to that house to gaze upon the dead face of Ethel."

"And you do not know where the house to which you were led is located?"

"No."

"Do you know certainly that Ethel is dead?"

"Yes."

"What proof have you?"

"I gazed upon her dead face."

"I might have something to tell you if you would make a confidant or me."

The young man was deeply agitated, and in a trembling voice said:

"You are throwing out very strange hints."

"I am."

"What do they all mean?"

"They mean it will be better for you to confide in me."

"Do you suggest that Ethel is not dead?"

"I am to listen to your story before I tell you mine."

The young man stood, lost in thought, but at length said:

"I do not know what to do."

"You would be a fool to kill yourself on the proofs you possess of Ethel's death."

"Is she living?"

"Did you not look upon her dead face?"

"I did; and what a fool I am!"

"Yes; you are a fool."

"Our remarks had different meanings."

"Yes."

"I wish you would speak plainly to me."

"I am not the party in interest. I am an officer. I have secured some facts, and I have reached certain conclusions."

"What conclusions have you reached?"

"I have reached the conclusion that in some way you are being imposed upon by a villain."

The young man seized the detective's arm, and clutching it nervously, said:

"Oh, please speak plainly!"

"I think I have spoken plainly."

"How did you learn that I was led blindfolded to a certain house?"

"That is a professional secret. And now listen to me, my young friend. I am an honest man; I am disposed to be your friend, but you must gain my friendship."

"How?"

"Tell me your story."

A moment the young man pondered, and then said:

"I will tell you all."

"Yes, give me all the facts of your history."

"It is strange that I should conclude to confide in any one; but somehow I feel that you will prove a friend—a friend indeed."

"If my present conclusions are confirmed, you will find me a true friend."

"My name is Wilbur Beach. I am an artist. I am a very poor man. Indeed, to-day I paid out the last dollar I had in the world."

"That is strange," remarked the detective; and a shadow fell over his face.

"Why do you say it is strange?"

"You say you spent your last dollar to-day, and yet you offered me a costly watch, diamond studs, and a valuable ring?"

"I did."

"Then how is it you say you are poor?"

"I inherited the articles named. They are all I possess in the world. I could never sell them, and besides, I have no desire to live."

"I have an idea that you will be very anxious to live in a few days."

"You throw out very strange suggestions."

"I do; but go on with your story."

"I am an American; my father was an artist. He earned considerable money, but spent it as he went along. He sent me to college, and intended that I should become a professional man. He was determined that I shouldn't become a painter; but after his death I determined to study art, and went to Paris."

"I had been in Paris some years, and earned a living by copying paintings in the Luxembourg. These I sold to American tourists, and as I made copies very rapidly, I earned considerable money."

"One summer I went to Italy. I had been in Genoa a few days, and started for Roma. I was sitting in the train, when a gentleman and lady entered the car in which I was sitting. The lady was closely veiled, but from her figure I could see that she was young, and, I naturally concluded, also beautiful.

"I soon discovered that they were Americans, although they talked in French. I am quite a linguist. I speak several continental languages. I supposed the parties were brother and sister, as the man seemed too young to be the lady's father.

"The train dashed along the sea-shore until we arrived at Savona, where there is a railway restaurant. The place is about twenty-seven miles from Genoa. We had left the latter city late in the afternoon. At Savona the gentleman alighted from the train and entered the restaurant. I was engaged in reading, and was not paying much attention to what was going on around; but suddenly I was aroused by a scream, and starting up, I discovered that the train was in motion.

"It was the young lady who had uttered the scream, as she sprung to the door, and had it not been locked, I believe she would have leaped from the train.

"I saw what had occurred at once. The escort of the beautiful girl had been left behind. She was beautiful, for in her terror she tore aside her veil, and her lovely face was revealed. She made frantic efforts to get out, and cried madly; but she could not get out, and her cries were unheeded, as the train dashed on. I knew how to stop the train, and I confess that I failed to touch the button. On the contrary, I said to the fair girl:

"Miss, you need not be frightened; the gentleman can come on the next train."

"When the girl heard me speak English, she appeared to be reassured, and asked:

"How far does this train run before it stops?"

"I do not know," I said; but I added: "I think the safest thing for you to do is to go to Pisa."

"And when does the train arrive there?"

"This train will reach there a little before ten o'clock."

"At what hour does the succeeding train arrive at Pisa?"

"I can not tell," I said; "but I will inquire when this train next stops, and learn all the particulars for you."

"I will be greatly obliged," she said, and appeared to calm down. Then I knew the fact of my being an American was very reassuring to her under all the circumstances.

"How provoking it is!" she said, as she settled back in her seat.

"Yes, it is very provoking. But, after all, it is only an annoyance. I have no doubt your brother will be able to reach you at Pisa not more than two or three hours after your arrival."

"The gentleman is not my brother," said the lady, quickly. "He is my guardian."

"Excuse me," I said; and I felt that there was less need for anxiety. There is a difference between a brother and a guardian; and I said further: "It is possible we will find a telegram from your guardian at the next stopping-place, and he will give you instructions as to what you shall do."

"It was quite a romantic episode," remarked the detective.

"Yes, I was delighted. The lady was not only beautiful, but the most charming person I had ever met. We became engaged in a lively conversation, and did not seem to have talked more than a few minutes when the train came to a stop at Oneglia, a town sixty miles from Genoa.

"It was our first stop after leaving Savona, and I went to the telegraph station, expecting, as a matter of course, to receive a telegram for the young lady, whose name I had learned was Ethel Page.

I speak Italian fluently, and had no difficulty in making all necessary inquiries; but there was no telegram. It struck me as very strange, as I thought it would have been the most natural thing for the gentleman who had been left behind to do; but there was no telegram, and I learned that there would be no train passing through Savona until after midnight. I returned and reported to the young lady. She did not appear as greatly disappointed as I thought she would be. All she remarked was:

"Well, it can not be helped now. He will not reach Pisa until morning."

"No."

"What shall I do?" she muttered.

"Let me act as your guardian until your real escort rejoins you," I said.

"I may put you out."

"No, you need not fear," I said. "I will be delighted to look after you until the gentleman arrives."

"I can not see as I can do anything else," she remarked. And I was happy."

"I should think you would be."

"Oh, sir, had you ever seen her you would not wonder. And now to think that the beautiful Ethel is dead!"

"I don't know about that," said the detective, in a musing tone.

"You do not know?" ejaculated the young man. "What do you mean?"

Our detective had formed a conclusion in his own mind. He had based his inferences upon facts that might not have so led another. He was not prepared to state his reasons, however, and he said:

"Go on with your narrative; I am deeply interested."

CHAPTER V.

RESUMING his narrative, the young man said:

"We met with quite a startling adventure ere we reached Pisa. The road between Genoa and Pisa runs through many tunnels. It has been known as a very dangerous road to travel on at night. During one winter, while I was a resident of Paris, over eight robberies took place on trains while running over this road.

"The young lady wore elegant diamonds in her ears, and it might be supposed that she had other very valuable jewelry upon her person.

"At any rate, just as the train was about to start from the station mentioned, a passenger was shown into our compartment. I did not like his looks. He did not appear like an ordinary first-class passenger, and I concluded he was some friend of the guard, who had smuggled him in when he should have gone into a second-class carriage.

"Ethel was sitting in one corner of the compartment, and I had determined to take the opposite seat; but the man anticipated me, and I felt very much annoyed as he fixed his wicked eyes on the young lady in the most daring and impudent manner.

"I did not know what to do, when suddenly the man addressed Ethel, speaking in Italian. He told her to remove her ear-rings and pass them over to him, and in a brutal tone said:

"If you do not comply with my demand, I will kill you and the gentleman!"

"I did not wait for Ethel's reply, but rose to arouse the guard by touching the electric alarm button.

"The man leaped up and grappled with me, and a terrible struggle followed. The man cursed and raved, but I am very strong, and was overmastering him, when he cried:

"Release me, or I will stab you to death!"

"Ethel screamed, and at that moment the train stopped. The guard ran to our compartment door, and help was at hand.

"It appeared afterward that there was an officer on the train. The man was under suspicion. The officer was in an adjoining car. He was waiting and watching for an alarm.

"The fellow was put under arrest, and very fortunately, as it also appeared later on, he was under surveillance for another crime.

"We arrived in due time at Pisa, and proceeded to the hotel. I secured a room for Ethel and went to another hotel for my own

lodgings. On the following day the young lady's guardian arrived. I was at the depot and met him, and informed him where he would find his ward. He did not even thank me. He appeared to be a surly sort of a man.

"I did not meet the young lady until a week later, when I met her in Rome. She was in company with her guardian. She vouchsafed me a pleasant bow and smile, and her guardian favored me with a black scowl.

"During our ride to Pisa we had talked a great deal, and after our startling adventure she had expressed her gratitude and admiration for my courage. I met her several times in Rome, but never had a chance to speak to her. We merely exchanged passing recognitions. It was evident to me that her guardian did not wish me to speak with her."

"What is the lady's guardian's name?"

"George Leighton."

"And was it her guardian who led you to behold the dead girl in her coffin?"

"It was."

"Proceed with your narrative."

"After two weeks Ethel and her guardian left Rome. I remained there three months, and then returned to Paris, and one day I was walking along the Rue de l'Opera when I saw a face. It was the beautiful face of a lady, and at a glance I recognized the lovely girl I had met on the train between Pisa and Savona.

"I was not certain at the time whether she saw me or not, but I recognized her. The carriage whirled along quickly, and I caught but a glimpse of her face. That same evening I sat in my lodgings, when a note was handed to me. I opened it, and, with a palpitating heart, read as follows:

"MY DEAR SIR,—I saw you to-day. I desire to meet you again. You were once my champion. You may again serve me. Be at the fountain, in the Place de la Concorde, to-morrow evening, and I may manage to see you. If I fail to meet you to-morrow evening, I may manage to do so the following night at about eight o'clock.

"In haste, and with an explanation to make, yours,

"ETHEL."

"When I received that note," said the young man, "my heart bounded. I confess I had become wildly and madly in love with the young lady; but I had not permitted myself to indulge my hope until I received that note, and then I became filled with hope, and all manner of wild dreams darted through my imagination."

"I do not wonder you fell in love under all the circumstances."

"Yes, I was madly in love."

"And did you meet the young lady?"

"Yes, I did; and the meeting led to a series of the most startling adventures. Upon the following evening," continued the young man, "I appeared at the appointed place, and I had been there but a few moments, when the young lady appeared. As it afterward developed, she came there with her maid, an Italian woman, in whom she had perfect confidence. It was the Italian woman who had brought the note to me, and—"

"And she proved false in the end?" interrupted the detective.

"Yes, she proved false in the end."

"She was the paid agent, I suppose, of the young lady's guardian?"

"She was."

"Proceed. I repeat, I am deeply interested," said the officer.

"When the young lady joined me, I saw her motion to her maid, and she said to me:

"Let me take your arm. I have a great deal to tell you, and I will explain my boldness and seeming indiscretion in asking you to meet me here."

"She did take my arm, and we started to cross the park and walk toward the gardens of the Tuilleries.

"We had proceeded but a few steps, when she said:

"There is one fact of which I must inform you: You may be called upon to face a great peril if you attempt to aid me."

"I do not fear, and you need not give that phase of our acquaintance one thought," I said.

"I will tell you my story," she said.

"We had reached the gardens, and were proceeding along. I was engrossed in listening to her sweet voice, and interested and full of anticipation as concerned her promised strange revelations. I did not look to the right or to the left; my mind was in a whirl. I was almost blind with delight and interest.

"Suddenly I heard a scream. The fair girl released her hold of my arm, and the next instant I received a blow, and fell headlong to the ground. For a moment I was stunned, and lay where I fell; but finally reviving, I arose and looked around.

"The girl had disappeared—I stood alone, save when a man passed me and looked at me closely. I did not know whether or not he had seen me knocked down, for I was fully conscious that I had received a blow.

"I returned to the Place de la Concorde. I walked to and fro for over an hour, but saw no more of the young lady, and finally I returned to my lodgings."

"Did you discover who it was that knocked you down?" queried the detective.

"I have suspicion; but to this day I have no proof."

"Do you not suspect it was the lady's guardian?"

"Certainly, I did so suspect at the first; but the man denies the charge, and has since pretended to be my friend."

"Proceed."

"I returned to my lodgings. I sat down and thought the matter all over, and despite my mad love for the beautiful girl, a certain terrible suspicion ran through my mind."

"What did you suspect?"

"I suspected that she had gratified an insane desire to perpetrate

a practical joke, all the circumstances were so strange. Yes, as I thought the matter over, it came to me that possibly she had acted under the advice of her guardian, and had become a party to a plan to cure me of my infatuation."

"But had you confessed your love to her?"

"No."

"Then I can not see how you could harbor such a suspicion."

"I know now that I did her an injustice. Indeed, I learned very shortly afterward that she was true and sincere, and the victim, as well as myself, of treachery. I will not say that I really suspected her of having amused herself at my expense, but the idea did float through my mind, and I became very angry, determined, if such should prove to be the fact, that I would have my revenge, at least on the party who had struck me the blow."

"On the day following the adventure I have related, I was walking in one of the parks, when I became aware that a man was following me, and keeping me under the strictest surveillance.

"I suspected that the fellow was a detective officer, and I wondered why he should be watching me. I walked around to different points, and the man always appeared somewhere near me. I determined to face him and discover if possible his purpose. I walked down a path and suddenly plunged through a hedge of shrubbery and stood face to face with the man.

"'You are following me?' I asked, abruptly.

"'You are mistaken,' came the answer.

"'I am not mistaken,' I charged.

"'You insult me, sir,' he said.

"'No; you insult me by dogging me in this way, and I will know your purpose.'

The man laughed in an irritating manner, and said:

"'I think you are crazy.'

"'I am not crazy; and I order you to explain what you mean, or go off about your business.'

"'I have no explanation to make. I do as I choose.'

"'Mark me; your surveillance is an annoyance and insult. I warn you to desist,' and with this last warning I turned and walked away.

"The man greeted me with an irritating laugh, and I hoped that I would see no more of him; but a few moments later, as I came out from the Luxembourg Palace, I met the man. He leered at me in an aggravating way, and his whole manner and expression indicated that he was purposely annoying and insulting me. I was tempted to knock him down, but I refrained and walked away; but a few moments later that man was on my track again."

"You would have served him right if you had knocked him down," said the detective.

"Well, I did knock him down," said the young man; "and a tragedy followed the deed."

CHAPTER VI.

"You did right when you knocked him down," said the detective.

"It might have proved a fatal deed, for there was a design on foot to murder me."

The detective was surprised.

"When I knocked the man down," resumed the narrator, "I stood ready for him to resent the blow; but he merely sprung to his feet, and flashing a terrible look upon me, walked away.

"But that night I heard from him. I received a challenge, and, like a great fool, I accepted it. We met. He thought, I knew, that he would have me at his mercy. It was his intention, I am now satisfied, to murder me. It was all part of a scheme. But I am an able swordsman. Instead of his having me at his mercy, I proved the better swordsman."

"And did you kill him?"

"I have been given to understand that he died on the field. I was warned, and fled from Paris.

"Who warned you?"

"It was a secret warning."

"You never had any actual proof that the man died on the field?"

"I never had any actual proof."

"When you fled from Paris, where did you go?"

"I came to New York."

"How long have you been in New York since the occurrences you have related?"

"Over a year."

"And have you seen the young lady since?"

"I saw her in her coffin."

"How did you chance to go to that house?"

"Here comes the strangest part of my narrative. I one day received a visitor. The man I had never seen before, as I thought but he revealed his identity. He proved to be the guardian of the fair girl Ethel; and how he discovered my whereabouts, or why he sought me, I do not know. But he told me that Ethel was dying of hasty consumption, and desired to see me. The man called upon me several times, and told me from day to day that he would arrange for an interview."

"He told you the lady desired to see you?"

"Yes."

"Yours is indeed a strange story."

"Why he should seek me I do not know."

"You have never seen the lady since that night in Paris?"

"No."

"You have no proof that your love for her was returned?"

"No."

"When the man came to see you, he did not tell you she loved you?"

"No."

"What reason did he give for her desire to see you?"

"He did not offer any explanation."

"Did you not demand one?"

"I did."

"And what did he say?"

"He said she would explain."

"But he did not take you to see her?"

"No. He said that she was very weak, and that he was only waiting for her to rally, so she would have strength to receive me."

"Well, this is an odd narrative," remarked Henry; and he added: "You appear to be a bright fellow; but, after all, you seem to lack discernment."

"How do I lack discernment?"

"I will explain later on. Proceed with your narrative. But one thing is certain; you are being made the victim of a series of tricks."

"How?"

"We will talk that over after I have heard all the particulars."

"There is but little more to relate."

The young man repeated many conversations he had with the guardian who acted in such a mysterious manner, and finally related how he had been told that the fair girl was dead, and how he had been taken to the house at midnight, blindfolded, and had been permitted to gaze on the dead face; and then he continued:

"The guardian confessed to me that Ethel had expressed a great interest in me. I was led from the house, and the rest you know."

"This is your story?" said the detective.

"Yes."

"I am astonished at your obtuseness."

"What astonishes you, sir?"

"I am astonished that you have not seen through a deep design. Yours is indeed a strange story. The methods employed to fool you are the most incomprehensible moves that ever came under my observation. But the interpretation is plain."

"How do you interpret the events?"

"It is certain the young lady loved you."

"I have believed that."

"If she loved you and was dying, what objection could there be to your meeting her?"

"She was too weak to see me."

"But why should that man seek you?"

"At her request."

"Aha! my young friend, there is more at the bottom of all this than you have discerned. I think there is some strange reason why this guardian wishes you to believe that the young lady is dead."

Wilbur Beach started as he said:

"You throw out a strange suggestion. Your words would imply—"

"Yes; my words would imply that I doubt the fact of the girl's death."

"I saw her in her coffin. I know she is dead. And now I confess I have no desire to live. I loved that girl as madly as man ever loved woman. If I lived I should go mad."

"You will live, and you will not go mad. Why should that man take you to the house where the dead girl lay after having blindfolded you? Why should he fear to have you learn where he resided?"

"The whole affair is very mysterious."

"Yes, it is; but I think I dive deep into the mystery, and I have already reached a conclusion."

"And what is your conclusion?"

"It is strange that the suspicion should thus run through my mind; but I believe there has been a double deception."

There followed an interval of silence. The young man sat in a thoughtful mood, looking into the water. The detective had his eye on him, and finally said:

"Young man, I will confess I believe you have told me the truth. I am deeply interested in you; I am deeply interested in your narrative, and I propose to become your friend."

"And you will not arrest me?"

"If I am fully assured that you have recovered your reason, I will not arrest you."

"What will you do?"

"I said I would become your friend. I propose to examine into this matter; I propose to make an investigation."

"What will you investigate?"

"I will first investigate the circumstances of this young lady's death."

"You have intimated that you do not believe she is dead."

"I will admit I suspect that you are the victim of a trick."

"What could be the purpose of the trick?"

"That is one of the points I shall investigate in case I learn that the beautiful Ethel is still living."

"You set my mind in a whirl. But no, it can not be."

"Would it not be well to make sure that she is dead?"

"Did I not gaze upon her dead face?"

"Answer me one question: Why should her guardian seek you?"

"I can not settle that matter in my own mind."

"Why should he come and tell you she was dying, promise to take you to see her, and fail to keep his promise?"

"She was too weak to see any one."

"If she was dying she would see you, if the guardian's statements are true; but why should he take you to gaze upon her dead body?"

A light appeared to break in upon the young man's mind, and he ejaculated:

"Great mercy! I see—I see! How blind I have been!"

"What do you see?"

"I see that after all that man might have a motive in making me believe that she was dead when she might still be living; but—"

"Well?"

"But it was the dead I gazed upon. How do you explain that away?"

"She may have been the victim of a trick, and there may have been a double deception. One thing is certain: the guardian did not want you and the girl to meet in life. He desired you to know that she was dead; or, at least, to believe so. I have had considerable experience. I have known of very strange incidents that have occurred. I tell you I shall, in your interest, satisfy myself as to the circumstances of her death."

"But how can you?"

"I can do so."

"I was taken to that house blindfolded. I can not give you the least intimation as to where I was led."

"It is not necessary. I know where the house is located."

"That is strange."

"I know other strange facts in connection with this man Leighton. I was watching him when I first met you to-night. I followed you in order to learn from you the history of that man. It is well I did follow you, otherwise at this moment you would be a mutilated corpse floating with the tide. There is a strange fate in all this. I am satisfied that this man Leighton is a villain."

"There seems to be a fate in it all," remarked the young man.

"Yes, and there is more. I believe some deep and dark conspiracy is at the bottom of it all. Do you remember the girl's words to you? She said she had a story to tell—a strange story."

"Yes; it is true, she did use those words."

"And did she not tell you that you would invite peril in aiding her?"

"She did."

"You have been very blind."

"I took too much for granted."

"It is evident that you did. But do you recall that her warning was verified almost immediately? Were you not knocked down even while she was speaking? Were you not forced into a combat? Were you not convinced your antagonist meant to murder you? You fled from Paris, you came to New York, and this man seeks you out. If the girl was about to die, why need he, as an enemy, desire to have you assured of the fact? He had sought to kill you or have you killed, according to your own statement, and yet he seeks you out and shows you the dead face of the girl."

"You hold forth most strange and wonderful suggestions."

"I do, simply because the facts are responsible."

"And what do you believe, sir?"

"I believe that the girl still lives, and if she lives, I suspect that the man who led you to believe that she is dead has also led her to believe that you are dead."

CHAPTER VII.

The detective and the young man held an extended conversation, and our hero revealed some of the suspicions that were passing through his mind. Finally he asked:

"And how is it to be? Are you to look upon me as a friend?"

"I am glad to look upon you as a friend; but why should you wish to take all this trouble on my account?"

"I will not consider it a trouble. I will be glad to solve this mystery. It will cost me nothing, and I will receive pay for my time without looking to you. And, having saved you from death, I am, to a certain extent, responsible for your happiness. Yes, if you will accept me, I shall be glad to become your friend."

"I am only too glad to accept your offer of friendship."

"If you do, you will have to follow my advice and trust me."

"I am prepared to do both."

"Very well. This man may see you again."

"Yes; it is possible."

"You must let him think that you believe in the death of the girl Ethel. You must not drop one word of suspicion."

"I will not."

"I will make it my duty to satisfy myself as to the facts concerning the alleged death of the girl; and if convinced that she still lives, I will investigate the man's motive. I already have a theory. You will go to your lodgings, and I will accompany you."

The detective discovered that the youth occupied a room in a hotel, and was in the habit of getting his meals outside. He accompanied Wilbur to his room, and said:

"You must permit me to become your banker."

"How can I pay you back?"

"I will show you, when the time comes, how you can pay me back. And now mark my words: no matter what you saw, no matter what you believe, I have the very best of reasons for suspecting that Ethel still lives, and I am satisfied that I can prove that she lives. I will tell you this much: the house where Leighton lives has been under surveillance for a long time. No doctor visited the house, and no undertaker entered it; there has followed no funeral, nor has there been a record of a death in the books of the health commissioner. If the girl is dead, she was murdered. I do not believe she is dead, and before this time to-morrow night, I propose to establish the facts one way or the other."

The detective finally, after many concluding cautions, departed; and when once again in his own lodgings, he muttered:

"I think I can see through this whole scheme. It is the old story: love, lots of money, and a conspiracy, and one that is well arranged, and one that might be successfully carried through were it not that now I am on to the little game, and I propose to be on the side of the right."

On the morning succeeding the incidents we have described, Jack Sheppard called on the detective, and asked:

"Well, what have you discovered?"

"I have learned a great many strange facts, Jack," was the answer.

The detective proceeded to disclose to the youth as much as he thought it wise to tell him at that stage of the game.

"I lay on the watch for quite a long time," said Jack.

"And what did you discover?"

"Nothing particular; but I am convinced that there is something wrong. Why should the body of that girl be kept in that house?"

"She is probably buried by this time in the grave in the cellar."

"Yes; and I think we should enter the house."

"I think we will make a few investigations, Jack."

"You had better move pretty quick."

"I will move at once. And now let me tell you, it will not do if you go contrary to my orders. I told you it would be better for you to keep away from that house, and you say you were on the watch all night."

"I did not go near the house. I watched from a distance."

"I do not wish the man Leighton to suspect that he is being watched by any one."

That same day Henry Brand had a consultation with a friend; and when night came, two men went to the vicinity of the cottage, and at about nine o'clock a man came forth.

Henry Brand at once said to his companion:

"There's your man, and you know what I need."

"It's all right; you can depend upon me."

It was the man Leighton who came from the old frame house, and the man who had been with the detective started to follow him. The detective, meantime, lay around for fully half an hour, when he muttered:

"I reckon the road is clear now, and I will go in and take a look at the dead girl in the coffin."

Henry Brand approached the house, and he walked all round it, taking a careful survey. There were no lights in the house, and all appeared as still as though it were a veritable tomb.

The detective finally approached the door. He had come prepared, and found little difficulty in entering the house. Once inside, he drew his mask-lantern, and with a careful step entered the room where Jack had said he had seen the coffin. The detective flashed the light of his lantern around, but did not see anything that looked like a coffin.

The room was furnished in a very plain manner. There was a little stove in the fire-place, a table, a little crockery-ware, and several utensils that might be used in cooking on a small scale. There were some fragments of a meal on the table, and also a display of food in the open closet.

The detective looked around carefully, but saw nothing that looked at all suspicious, and finally he remarked:

"I reckon some one has been fooled by his imagination."

The detective had determined to take matters coolly, and show he did not anticipate any sort of interruption, at least for several hours.

He sat down in a chair and looked around. He held his lantern aloft in one hand, and moved the sharp ray of light from point to point. He studied everything with the utmost carefulness.

After about twenty minutes' study, he rose and ascended the stairs. The house had but one story and an attic over the ground floor. There were three rooms on the second floor. In the larger room there was one bed. There were no beds in the two smaller rooms.

"Halloo!" muttered the officer. "This knocks out one theory, I reckon. My Jack Sheppard must have romanced a little when he told me he saw a lady in this house."

The detective was as deliberate in the upper rooms as he had been in the lower rooms. He sat down and looked around very carefully.

The room was but sparsely furnished, and it was evidently the chamber of a man. There were men's clothes hanging in the closets. There were a great many boxes, and one or two old trunks, and other articles such as one might expect to find in a bachelor's apartment. The detective could discover nothing that would suggest that at any time a lady had been the occupant of the room.

"The lad was very positive," muttered Henry; "but I reckon he must have been mistaken."

At length Henry rose, and went to the bureau. He pulled open one of the drawers, and commenced rummaging around, and soon he discovered a card.

It lay face downward. He picked it up, and an exclamation of amazement fell from his lips.

It proved to be a photograph, and it was the picture of a wonderfully beautiful girl.

"Great Caesar!" he exclaimed. "This begins to look like a corroboration, after all."

The picture represented a girl who could not have been more than eighteen or nineteen. She was plainly attired, as she appeared in the picture; the expression of her face was very pleasing.

"I reckon I'll keep this," muttered the officer, as he put the picture in his coat-pocket.

He commenced a more thorough search, and soon came upon a package. The covering was of soft white tissue paper.

The detective opened it, and found himself in possession of a lock of silky hair, evidently taken from the head of a lady.

"Hang it!" he muttered, "this affair is beginning to open up well."

The officer found several other little articles, and then ascended to the attic.

He looked about. There was a heap of papers, an old trunk, a few empty boxes in one corner—nothing more; and after a hasty cursory search, he descended to the ground floor. Seating himself, he began to think matters over; but after a time he rose, and said:

"I will take a look down in the cellar."

He found the cellar stairs, and, lantern in hand, descended. There indeed was the open grave; but there was no coffin in it.

"This is a clear confirmation," he muttered; and a cold chill ran over his frame as the suggestion came to his mind that there was a possibility that, after all, the story of the dead girl might prove to be a real fact.

He stepped beside the grave and then flashed his light around, and he suddenly started—indeed, a cold chill did run over his frame, and he stood transfixed, for there in one corner of the cellar stood a coffin on end. The head-piece had been removed, and the face of the dead was plainly visible under the sharp ray from his lantern.

There was no mistaking the identity of the dead face. It was the face of the girl whose photograph the detective had found upstairs in the drawer, and the hair corresponded to the tress he had found wrapped in the tissue paper. Her eyes were closed, her features like marble, but classically beautiful even in death.

The detective was filled with awe. The testimony of his own eyes he could not refuse to believe; and the question arose in his active mind: How had she met her death?

CHAPTER VIII.

STRANGE indeed were the circumstances. Why had the coffin been stood on end in that corner? Why had not the body been put in the grave? Why the need of the evident concealment of her death?

Rapidly he revolved all the facts in his mind, and there came the conviction that a foul and brutal murder had been committed.

He stood, as stated, with his head turned away; but there was a fascination even about the dead beauty, and he turned and again flashed his light upon the beautiful face, and then he looked away again. He could not muster nerve enough to gaze on the relic of what in life must have been wondrously beautiful.

The suspicion that settled in the detective's mind was that the girl had been poisoned; that it was a murder, he had no doubt.

Jack Sheppard, according to his statement, had seen the girl alive within a few days. She had shown no signs of illness. The man Leighton had for weeks held out the statement to Wilbur Beach that the fair Ethel was ill unto death.

Strangely enough, in the glances the detective had cast upon the corpse, he had observed that there were no signs of emaciation, such as would appear in the body of one who had died after a wasting illness; and as he considered, he determined to go closer and examine, and a most terrible and startling *dénouement* followed.

He went close to the coffin. He gazed closely at the dead face under the glass. After a moment there came a strange look in his eyes. Then wantonly he reached forward the hand holding the lantern, and, with a quick blow, broke the glass plate. His other hand he thrust forward, and placed his finger upon the forehead of the dead girl, and at once he exclaimed in a very peculiar tone of voice:

"Well, I'll be hanged if this doesn't beat anything I ever encountered in all my life! Great Scott! but what a game it is!"

The detective had penetrated the fraud; he had made a most singular and remarkable discovery—one of the most singular discoveries, under all the circumstances, probably ever made by an officer.

It was not a dead body at all, but a molded figure in wax! The skill displayed in the manufacture was simply extraordinary, but wax it was; and the discovery opened up conjectures as to a fraud of the most deep and diabolical character.

Henry Brand could well understand how both Jack Sheppard and Wilbur Beach had been deceived. He had, at the first glance, been deceived himself; but a nearer view had aroused a suspicion in his mind, and he did as we have related.

Those of our readers who have never seen a wax figure skillfully made can form no idea of the life-like effects that can be produced. Those who have seen these figures can readily understand how much easier it is to represent the dead, especially under the circumstances and conditions under which Jack Sheppard and Wilbur Beach gazed upon the figure in the coffin.

Henry Brand ascended the stairs. He was delighted; his theory was vindicated. He could go to Wilbur Beach and tell him that Ethel still lived. Indeed, he made up his mind, after some thought, to do a very curious thing. He would steal the wax figure, take it to his quarters, and give the young man a most convincing proof of the fraud that had been practiced. He knew that in taking the figure he would sound a note of warning; he would give the enemy intimation. But, alas! he had broken in the glass plate, and the man would know that some one had penetrated his weird secret.

The detective returned to the cellar. He always went provided with the necessary implements for possible contingencies. He had a screw-driver, and with it removed the casket's top, when he discovered that the deception was only a bust figure.

Henry commenced to look around to discover something in which to wrap his find, and he saw lying in a recess an old coach-robe. He raised it, and started back aghast. He had uncovered another corpse—in wax!

"Great guns!" he ejaculated, "how this thing is opening up, and how well all my theories are being fully confirmed!"

The corpse in wax that the detective had uncovered was a representation of Wilbur Beach, and the thing was, in its resemblance to the original, most skillfully and wonderfully made.

"Whoever made these ghastly objects," remarked the detective, "was indeed a skilled hand."

He could not carry away both the figures at once; but he determined to secure them, and he carefully carried the wax bust of Wilbur Beach up the stairs. He went outside the door, and hid the thing, determined to come back for it after having carried the bust figure of the girl to his lodgings.

Having secured one figure, he returned and secured the other. He then locked the door behind him and started for his lodgings, carrying the bust wrapped in the old coach-robe. He had proceeded but a short distance. The hour was near midnight. The time he had waited and the time he had spent in the old frame

house making his strange discoveries had amounted to over two hours. It had gone rapidly. As Henry walked along, he muttered:

"It would be an odd adventure if some officious cop should get on to me."

The detective was passing by some vacant lots. It was in a lonely neighborhood. There were no houses within several hundred feet. He started to make a short cut across the common, when suddenly he heard steps behind. He turned, and faced a big policeman, who demanded:

"What have ye in the sack?"

Henry was a joker, and he determined, spite his lack of time, to have a little sport, and he came to a halt, and said:

"It does not concern you what I have in the sack."

"Oh, is that the way you're puttin' it? Well, ye will find it does concern me what ye have in the sack. Come now, show me what ye have."

"Do you know what I am?"

"I know what I think ye are."

"And what do you think I am?"

"Shure, I believe ye are a thafo; that's what I think ye are."

"I'm not a thief."

"Oh, no! I've never met the devil yet that was willin' to confess to it; but ye are a thafo, all the same, in my opinion, me friend, and I'll see what's in the sack. Come now; open it up!"

"But I'm not a thief."

"What are ye, thin?"

"I'm a ghoul."

"Ye are, now. Well, ye'll let me see the contents of your sack; an' if ye are a ghoul, maybe it's good ye have in the sack."

"If you compel me to show what's in the sack, you will regret it all your life afterward."

"I will?"

"You will—yes. The sight will blast your eyes. You will never be able to efface it from your memory."

"See here, me friend; ye can come none o' that nonsense over me. Will ye open the sack?"

The detective laid down his bundle carefully, and said:

"If you insist, I suppose you must have your way."

"I will see what ye have in the sack."

The detective drew aside the covering a bit and disclosed the calm, dead face.

The policeman started back, his hair standing on end.

"I told you that you would be sorry."

"It's a murderer ye are! Great powers! but I wer' lucky to come on to ye."

The policeman had recovered his nerve, and advanced, club in hand.

"Shure," he said, "I'll take ye and the dead woman wid me to the station."

"You can not take me. I'm a ghoul, I tell you."

"Yes; an' I've got ye; an' ye'll come along wid me, or I'll make a corpse av ye as well wid me club."

"The woman is not dead."

"What's that ye're sayin'? Can't I see wid me own eyes? Shure, it's a woman cut in two parts, an' ye have the upper part, ye monster!"

"Don't let him take us in!" came a voice from under the cloth—for the detective had covered the face of his figure again.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was a woman's voice the policeman had heard, and the man stared as though his eyes would burst from his head, and he gave utterance to a semi-plaintive ejaculation which we will not repeat.

"Go away, policeman—go away! I am not dead. It's only a joke we're going to play."

The policeman staggered back.

"I've left my legs at home. It's all right, Mister Policeman. Go away. It's only a joke."

"There! are you satisfied now?" demanded the detective.

The officer could not speak. He was dumfounded. He stood like one paralyzed.

"Go off now," said Henry, "and we'll say nothing about it. We're ghosts having a little fun of our own. It's all right; but if you interfere, we'll take you back to the grave yard with us."

The policeman was scared beyond calculation; but a sense of duty prevailed, and he exclaimed, after a moment:

"Ghosts or no ghosts, I'll take you in!"

The policeman raised his club and leaped forward. The detective grappled with him, and threw him to the ground without an effort; indeed, the trick had been worked so deftly, the policeman felt himself go down as though he had literally been struck with a club. In an instant, however, he leaped to his feet again; and he was about to sound his whistle, when the detective said:

"Hold on, old man! It's all right."

"By all that's strange and queer, I'll do my duty! Do ye mind?"

"Come here!"

The detective pointed to the figure.

"Sorra a step will I go near that thing!"

"The lady wants to whisper in your ear."

The policeman drew further and further away, and the detective laughed; and there seemed to come a laugh also from under the cloth. The detective leaped forward. He grasped the policeman, and he soon had the man lying helpless on the ground.

Our hero then removed his bundle, and hid it behind a rock. He worked a complete transform, and returned to where the policeman lay just as the poor man was getting over the effects of a dose of chloroform that had been deftly administered. The detective

raised the man to his feet, and commenced cuffing and rubbing his ears.

"Wake up—wake up!" said Henry.

The man appeared to be completely dazed.

"Am I awake?" came the query.

"Yes; it's lucky I saw you, or the roundsman might have come along, and found you asleep on your post, and it would have gone hard with you. But you were asleep, old man, and I reckon you were dreaming."

"Begorra! but it's drahmin' I am now, I fear."

"No; you're all right now. But you were asleep."

"Did ye see a man around here wid a dead woman wrapped in a cloth?"

"There was no one around here. I saw you lying there, and I thought you were a dead man."

"Well, well; but I'm bothered! An' can it be possible I were drahmin'?"

"You were dreaming, and talking in your sleep when I tried to awaken you."

"Well, then, it was a quare drahme I had," came the declaration.

"It's all right, old man; but you must be careful in future. It would go hard with you if another were to find you asleep and dreaming on your post."

The policeman appeared to be completely dazed, and had he not felt sleepy at the moment, he might have doubted the statement; but having a vivid recollection of what he had seen and what had occurred, and seeing nothing that agreed with the alleged dream, he came to the conclusion that he must have been asleep, and walked off, muttering:

"I don't understand it at all, so I don't."

After the policemen had disappeared, the detective secured his bundle, and without further adventure reached his lodgings, and also succeeded in returning to the frame house and securing the other figure.

On the day following the incidents we have described, the detective made certain arrangements which will be disclosed as we progress, and then proceeded to meet the young man Wilbur Beach.

"I am glad you have come," said the young man.

"Yes; I think you will have occasion to be glad," came the answer.

"I have been thinking over all that has passed."

"Well?"

"I am satisfied that Ethel is dead. I saw her body. It was the dead I saw. No living person could simulate death as I saw it."

"Young man, you made me a promise. You are not to come to any conclusion, any positive conclusion, until after I have completed my investigations; and I think that within twenty hours I will have most startling revelation to make."

The detective had just completed his declaration when there came a knock at the door, and a card was handed to the young man.

"It is Leighton," he said. "Do you wish him to find you here?"

"No. I will go into this closet. You are a man of nerve, and can conceal the fact. I have particular reasons for wishing not only to see this man, but I desire to overhear all that he may have to say."

The detective entered the closet, and a few minutes later the man Leighton entered the room. He was not disguised. He appeared to be a comparatively young man. The detective had a good opportunity for reading his face, and he saw, as he concluded, the face of a very bad and cunning man.

The fellow looked troubled as he entered the presence of Wilbur Beach. He sat down and looked around in a furtive manner.

After a few moments, the detective, who was peeping at him, discovered the cause of his discomfiture, and also the purpose of his visit to young Beach.

The officer decided that the fellow had discovered the fact that a visit had been paid to his house. He had discovered the fact that the wax figures which had played such a prominent part in his cute game were missing.

We will here state that our hero had seen his pal, and had learned how the latter had managed to keep the fellow Leighton away from his home until almost daylight. The man Leighton knew that he had not been home, but did not know that he had been the victim of a well-played trick.

"How do you feel this morning?" asked Leighton.

"I do not feel well."

"Probably you were out late last night."

"No; I was not out late last night."

The man Leighton fixed a keen glance on the face of Beach.

"I thought I saw you out," he said.

"No; I remained here."

"I am very sorry for you, Wilbur Beach."

"You are very kind."

"I have been thinking a great deal about you since the sad event known to you and myself."

"You are very kind."

"I feel that I should like to help you."

"I do not need help."

"Oh, yes, you do."

"No, sir; I am a desponding man."

"That's good," muttered the detective. "I hope he sticks to that mood for the present."

"You must not despair. You are a young man. You have all the world before you."

"I wish all the world were behind me."

"Oh, nonsense! But let me ask you a question: Did you ever meet a man named Strousse?"

"I never did."

"Did you ever meet a man who pretended to know something about your affairs?"

The detective trembled. The man Leighton had put a dangerous question. The detective himself had pretended to know something about the young man's affairs. The answer came:

"No; I never met a man who pretended to know something about my affairs."

The detective felt easier.

"Did you ever discover that a man—a stranger—was watching you?"

"No; but your questions are very strange."

"I am deeply interested in you."

"I can not see how you can be."

"I have explained to you. I have told you that my late ward took a great interest in you, and because of my affection for her, I feel disposed to become your friend. I know it would have pleased her."

"Do you know," said Wilbur, abruptly, "there was something very mysterious about her death?"

The man Leighton gave a start, and there came a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

"I do not really understand you," he said.

"You came to me, and said she was dying?"

"I did, at her request."

"You told me she desired to see me, and yet you never took me to see her."

"She was too ill to see any one."

"There is one more question I'd like to ask," said Wilbur.

"Ask it," came the answer.

"Why did you blindfold me when you took me to gaze on the dead face of Ethel?"

"I had excellent reasons. But I see you circumvented me."

"How?"

"You learned where the body lay."

"You are mistaken."

"Do you mean to tell me you do not know where the house is located where I took you that night?"

"I do not."

"It's strange."

"What is strange?"

"I was thinking," said the man.

"So have I been thinking."

"And what do you think?"

"I think it is right that you should give me some clear explanation. You have told me many things, and since Ethel's death I have been thinking over all you told me."

"What did I tell you?"

"You told me Ethel experienced a feeling of gratitude toward me. If it was merely a feeling of gratitude, why did she take the deep interest in me you have admitted?"

"Some day, young man, I will explain all to you."

"Why did you seek me?"

"It will all be explained."

"I think, sir, you have done me a great wrong."

"How? In what manner?"

"I believe that Ethel really did desire to see me before she died, and I believe you purposely prevented our meeting."

"You are mistaken, young man."

"The whole affair is very strange."

"Yes; but I have promised you an explanation at some future time."

"Where is Ethel buried?"

"She has not been buried."

"Then I desire to gaze once more on her dead face."

Again the man Leighton shot forth a peculiar look from his eyes.

"You can not see her face again."

"Why not?"

"The body has been shipped to France. It was her request."

"There is no reason why you should not explain everything to me now."

"I can not. But now listen: I am disposed to be your friend, and if you will permit me, I will be of great service to you."

"How can you be of service to me?"

"You will resume your studies. You can not go to France. You can go to Italy. I would like to see you succeed in life. If you will return to Italy, I will furnish you with all the money you need."

"You are very kind, but I do not need help."

The ferret-like eyes of the man Leighton were fixed upon the youth, and our hero, from his hiding-place, could watch every changing expression.

"You do not need help, you say?"

"I do not."

"Why not?"

"I have lost all interest in life."

"Nonsense! You are deceiving me; you are holding a secret from me. You have seen some one who has put ridiculous ideas in your head. Come, now. I am and will be your friend. Tell me all."

"I have nothing to tell you."

"I know that false hopes have been raised in your mind."

"What false hopes?"

"Oh, you must tell me."

CHAPTER X.

The detective trembled. He feared lest young Beach should give something away; but, as it proved, the young man was more cunning than he supposed.

"I have nothing to tell you," he said.

"Wilbur Beach, I wish I could tell you all the truth."

"There is no reason why you should not."

"Yes, there is a reason, and I regret it. Some day I will have a happy surprise for you; but I must wait one year and a day following the hour of poor Ethel's death."

"That is a strange statement."

"I know it; but I can offer no further explanation now; but you must trust me."

"There is nothing I have to trust to you."

"You are keeping facts from me—you are playing a part."

"How?"

"Some one has put strange and ridiculous ideas in your head. Some one has put you under a promise of secrecy. I bid you in your own interest reveal everything to me."

"You are talking riddles to me, Mr. Leighton. I do not know what you mean."

"You have seen no one who pretends to be your friend?"

"Yes; I have seen a man who says he is my friend."

The detective almost groaned, and the man Leighton gave a start.

"Ahl I thought so," he said.

"Yes, that much is true. He pretends to be my friend, but I do not believe he is my friend."

"No; you may rest assured he is not your friend. Who is the man?"

Wilbur smiled, and answered:

"You are the man! You are the only man who has come forward claiming to be my friend."

"You say you have no faith in my friendship?"

"I have not."

"Be careful, young sir!"

"You threaten me?"

"Yes; I know of something to your interest, but I am not bound to make the revelation to you."

"When you are ready to make any revelation to me, all right. Until you do, I shall feel you are not my friend."

A few moments' further conversation passed, and Leighton went away, and our hero stepped from his hiding-place, with the declaration:

"Young man, you are a brick!"

"I wonder what that man is after?" asked Wilbur Beach.

"He is up to some game, and I am really surprised at your strange obtuseness."

"How?"

"Why should that man follow you at all? Why should he pretend to be your friend? Why did he seek you in New York? Why does he make it appear the girl is dead, and still follow you up?"

"It is all very strange, I will admit; but in my own mind I have an explanation."

"What is your explanation?"

"I will not speak of it now."

"There is something else you are keeping from me?"

"No; I have told you all."

The detective asked the young man a great many questions, all of which were answered in the most satisfactory manner; and a great deal of light was let into the detective's mind, and he said:

"I can give you the explanation."

"Do so."

"I may flatter you."

"I will not permit myself to be flattered."

"That young lady is in love with you."

"She may have been."

"Well, let it go at that for the present. That man does not wish her to love you. He has other designs. The young lady is more independent of him than may appear, or some day she will be so."

"You speak of her as still living?"

"Certainly I do. You were imposed upon."

"How?"

"I propose to show you; and this night I will open up to you a revelation that will cause your hair to stand on end, and you will swear by me as the most faithful friend you ever had. I saved your life—I feel it my duty to make your life worth living."

"Your words are a marvel."

"My revelations will be marvelous. But that man asked you a singular question. He asked you if you had ever met a man named Strouse. Did you?"

"Never."

"There is a great deal behind that question."

"I can not discern anything."

"You will discern more clearly after to night. I tell you I will make some very strange revelations to you."

It was midnight when the detective, by appointment, met Wilbur Beach. He proceeded with him to an undertaker's, and when the young man saw into what manner of place he was being led, he recoiled.

"Where would you lead me?"

"I have something to show you in here."

"I see—I see!" cried the young man. "Ethel is dead!"

"Yes; but I've an idea: a sight of you may restore her to life."

Wilbur Beach gazed at the detective in amazement, and said:

"This is all very strange."

"It is; but it will be plain enough later on. You can trust me; I am not mad, nor do I mean to play a trick on you. I promised you a great revelation. I propose to keep my word. Follow me."

The young man followed the officer, but he was in a dazed condition.

The detective led the way through the outer door to a rear room. There was but a dim light in the room, and on rests were two coffins.

The detective stepped beside one of the coffins, and said in a solemn voice:

"You must have courage."

"What does all this mean?"

"You will fully understand later on."

"Have I been deceived all through?"

"You shall answer your own question later on. Come forward and look at this face, and tell me if you recognize it."

The detective had removed the pall from the head of the coffin, and with starting eyes, the young man advanced. He stood beside the casket; he looked upon the dead face, and his eyes started.

The detective let him stand and gaze an instant, and then asked:

"Do you recognize the face?"

"I do. It is Ethel."

"You are sure?"

"I am sure. Oh, why did you lead me to hope that she was still living?"

"The explanation is in the other coffin," said the detective.

He stepped to the other casket, and removing the pall, said:

"Come and look here."

The young man, with a trembling step, advanced to a place beside the second coffin. He glanced at the dead face, and it appeared as though he would fall back in a faint, had not the officer supported him.

Wilbur Beach was absolutely speechless. He gazed in silence, but his features were convulsed.

"Do you recognize that face?" demanded the detective.

The young man did not answer.

The detective repeated his question, and Wilbur found voice to mutter:

"What does it all mean? Am I waking, or do I sleep? Is this all a wild, weird dream?"

"You are awake. And now, tell me, do you recognize the face?"

"It is my own face," came the answer; "it is my double. Great mercy! what does it all mean? I shall go mad!"

"Not yet," said the detective.

Henry Brand had worked his little surprise, and he had done it well, and thus far he had handled the whole business with the utmost skill. He had, as has been intimated, worked upon a theory; but the strangest part of the mystery was yet to be solved.

"What does it all mean?" again ejaculated young Beach as his eyes wandered from one coffin to the other.

"Do you not realize what it all means?" asked Henry.

"I do not."

"I told you there had been a double deception."

"But that coffin?"

"Well?"

"Is it a twin sister?"

"Is that the body of a twin brother?" demanded the detective, pointing to the casket containing the wax counterpart of Beach.

"Will you explain? I am dazed."

"Come here," said our hero. He removed the glass covering, and he said: "Put your hand on that face."

The young man obeyed, and there came a look of amazement to his face as he exclaimed:

"It is wax!"

"Is it?"

"Yes—and that?" he demanded, pointing to the other coffin.

"It is wax also," came the answer.

The young man stood gazing in speechless amazement.

"And is that what I saw when I was led blindfolded to that house?"

"That is what you saw."

"Then Ethel lives?"

"That is the conclusion I have reached."

"But this?"

The young man again pointed to the waxen counterpart of himself.

"It is singular you do not discern. I told you there had been a double deception."

"I begin to grasp the idea. She has been led to believe that I am dead."

"Now you have it."

"And what is the man's purpose?"

"Ah! that is something we must now investigate. One fact is established: he desires you to believe the girl is dead, and we have every reason to conclude that he has played a trick on her in order to make her believe that you are dead."

"That man is a devil. But how could he deceive Ethel?"

"He deceived you."

"I am a fool. Why did I not detect the fraud?"

"Not one out of a hundred would have done so under all the circumstances. Those figures were very skillfully made, and the glass covering aided the deception."

"But now when I look—"

"Ah, yes; now when you look it is different. You look under different conditions. Your imagination aided the original deception."

"I repeat, what does it all mean?"

"We must discover. But in the meantime, we will compare our conclusions. What do you think it means?"

"I can not conceive."

"Let me try. You love the girl?"

"I do."

"This man Leighton suspects your love?"

"He knows I love the girl."

"Did you ever tell him so?"

"Now that I recall, all his conversations with me were based upon that idea."

"And you did not deny the soft impeachment?"

"I did not."

"The girl evidently loves you."

"I can not believe it."

"Then why should this man interest himself in you?"

"His interest is something I can not explain."

"I can. It was your love for the girl alone. What would he care? He had driven you out of Paris, and he seeks you in New York. He evidently has tried to convince the girl that you are dead. He certainly deceived you into the belief that she was dead."

"But his purpose?"

"I will tell you my theory. I believe the girl is an heiress. The man does not want her to marry you."

"But why should he resort to such strange deeds?"

"I have told you why; the girl loves you, and, as I believe, she is now, or in a short time will be, independent. She may be a determined girl, and may have resolved to permit you to love her."

"And what can be his design?"

"He desires her to marry some one else."

"Who?"

"I believe he desires to marry the girl himself. I believe she hates him, and possibly she has good reason for doing so."

"And what shall we do?"

"Our course is plain enough. We will find the girl."

"But she believes me dead."

"She may not."

"Do you think it possible she detected the trick?"

"It is possible she did."

"Where did you find these figures?"

"Both in the cellar of the man's present residence."

The detective proceeded and related the circumstances under which he found the two figures.

"This is all a very extraordinary series of incidents," remarked the young man.

"Yes; the incidents are all very strange; but I reckon we are on to the man's scheme."

"And do you think you can find the fair Ethel?"

"I will find her."

"This man will see me again?"

"Yes. He suspects, or did suspect, something."

"What did he suspect?"

"When he came to see you he had an idea that you were on to his secret."

"Then he still thinks it possible that I have detected the fraud?"

"Yes."

"What will he do?"

"That remains to be seen. One thing is certain: you are in peril. That man means to get rid of you some way."

"How can he?"

"He tried to have you murdered in Paris. He may try again in New York," came the declaration.

CHAPTER XI.

THERE came a fierce light in Wilbur's eyes as he said:

"The man had better be careful."

"And you must be careful."

"Why?"

"The man is evidently a deep, designing villain. He is prepared to resort to any device. It may be he will not stop at actual murder, as I have suggested."

"I will be on my guard."

"You must. And now mark me: he will see you again."

"Yes."

"Carry out the despair dodge act, and play that you believe Ethel to be really dead."

"But we must follow up this man."

"Leave all that to me. I am a detective. I flatter myself I know my business. I will go through him, you can rest assured."

"He knows that some one has detected his fraud."

"Yes; but he does not know whom."

"And the man Strouse?"

"Ah, he is the mystery! We must find this man Strouse. Should any stranger come to you, lay low, but follow him up, and report to me as speedily as possible."

"Who can this Strouse be?"

"That is a matter of conjecture; but it is evident he is in some way inimical to the man Leighton."

"Leighton has Ethel in his power."

"We are not sure of that. She is not living at present under his immediate control."

"You know that?"

"Yes; and what is more, if she were under his control, I can not see why he should seek to deceive her as to your death."

"All this is very strange," remarked the youth.

"Yes, it is all very strange, and the mystery I shall solve."

The detective and Wilbur Beach left the undertaker's establishment and returned to the latter's hotel. On the way the officer gave the young man a great many instructions.

On the day following the incidents we have described, our hero had a long talk with young Jack Sheppard. He questioned the youth very closely as concerning his having seen the young lady in the old frame house.

"I did see her," persisted the lad.

"You are sure you are not mistaken?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you see her standing still or did you see her move around?"

"I saw her appear and disappear at the window."

"And you are sure it was a living girl?"

"Certainly I am; but what do you mean?"

The detective related to the youth the story of the wax figures. Jack listened with distended eyes, but when the story had been concluded, he said:

"It was not a wax figure that I saw."

"You had never seen any one but the man there until that night?"

"No."

"Well, Jack, I am going to let you watch that house now. You must avoid being discovered; but I want you to watch and make a note of everything that occurs."

"You can depend upon me."

The detective, late in the afternoon, called upon Wilbur Beach. He did not find the young man in his hotel. Some hours later the officer called again, but the young man had not returned. Henry remained in the young man's rooms until after ten o'clock, but he did not show up.

"This looks bad," was Henry's comment, as he departed.

He proceeded to the old frame house. He went pretty close, and was taking a survey, when he observed the shadow of a man.

"Halloo!" he muttered; "what have we here?"

It was a clear night, and a few minutes later the detective saw the real figure that had cast the shadow, and he discerned that it was not Leighton, but another person.

He lay low and watched, and finally made the discovery that the stranger was taking the bearings of the house.

The man passed several times around the house, and then started to walk away. The officer took to cover, and the man passed within a few feet of him.

"I reckon I'll follow this fellow. It may be the man whom I trailed before."

The man walked along in a thoughtful mood, and the detective followed after him, when a most singular incident occurred.

The man suddenly darted to one side and hid himself, and a minute later his object in doing so was disclosed.

A second man came walking down the street, and the detective discovered that the second man was Leighton.

"Well, well!" muttered Henry; "this affair is getting rather complicated. But it's all right as long as I am on to the several moves of the complications."

Leighton passed on and entered the old frame house, and the detective, a moment later, was continuing his shadow of the stranger.

Henry Brand had made up his mind that the man he was following was in some way identified with the mysterious occupant of the old frame house, and he resolved to make the man's acquaintance. He followed for some time. The man walked down-town, and the detective kept upon his track.

The man finally sat down in one of the down-town parks, and it was not long before our hero observed that he had fallen asleep. A few moments he considered, and then decided upon his plan of action.

Henry was a patient fellow, and permitted the man to sleep one hour, and then he approached and shook him. The man started up, and made a movement as though about to draw a weapon. The detective quickly displayed his shield, however, and the man said:

"I am doing no harm. Why do you disturb me?"

"I think I've seen you before."

"Well, it's no crime on my part because you have seen me before."

Henry Brand made the discovery that he was talking to a well-educated man, although his clothes did not suggest that the fellow was a gentleman.

"It might be of some advantage to you if I became satisfied that I knew you."

"You do not know me. No one knows me in New York. I am a stranger in this city."

"Will you go with me?"

"Why should I go with you?"

"I'll give you a good bed to sleep in and a hot meal in the morning."

"You're very kind; but I do not want a good bed to sleep in. I prefer the open air; and as to the hot meal, I can get one when I need it. I am not a vagrant."

"You had better come with me, all the same."

"See here, mister, you're an officer?"

"Yes."

"All right; if you want to arrest me, go ahead."

"Do you wish to be arrested?"

"No; and you can not arrest me. I am not a criminal—" The man hesitated an instant, and then said: "That is, as far as the general public is concerned."

"I like you," said the detective.

The man laughed, and said:

"You will make nothing by liking me. I am not a beggar or a vagrant, but I'm so near being penniless it will not pay any one to try and work me."

"Do you think I want to make something out of you?"

"Well, yes; but you can't."

"Oh, yes, I can."

"Do you take me for a millionaire?"

"No."

"Then what can you make out of me?"

"I want some information."

The man looked at the detective in a puzzled manner.

"See here, my friend, you are making a fool of me, and I will give you a pointer: go away and leave me to attend to my own business."

"I told you I thought I had seen you before."

"Oh, that's only a guy. You and I never met before, and I hope we will never meet again."

"But I tell you I think I know you."

"Who am I?"

"I think your name is Strouse."

The man had retained his seat during the talk with our hero, but

upon the mention of the name Strouse, he leaped to his feet, advanced toward the detective, and in a fierce tone, said:

"See here, mister, officer or no officer, you will get into trouble if you bother around me."

"I think I can prove I am your friend."

"Bah! you can't do that. And you can tell your employer that if he has run me down he had better look out."

"Ah, I see!" said the officer. "You think I am a friend of Leighton?"

Again the man betrayed some agitation, and for a moment he appeared to consider, and finally he muttered:

"It's strange."

"What is strange?"

"Never mind. Just tell me what your game is. If you want to arrest me, get right down to work."

There was a fierce light in the man's eyes as he spoke, and his whole manner was suspicious. He looked like a man who had resolved to make resistance.

"I do not wish to arrest you."

"What do you want?"

"I want to have a talk with you."

The detective was off his guard. He was not suspecting anything, and suddenly the man shot forth his arm.

The officer received a blow that knocked him down, and although he regained his feet in an instant, when he looked around the man who had downed him had disappeared.

"Well, that was a nice clip for a student!" was our hero's remark, spoken in a tone of deep mortification.

It was just before dawn, and Henry did not attempt to follow the man. He made up his mind that he would come across him again, and when he and the fellow did meet, he would be on his guard.

Henry returned to his home, had a few hours' sleep, and then again appeared upon the street. He had thought matters over, and had decided upon his plan of action.

One fact he had established: the girl Ethel was not dead. He made up his mind to discover her whereabouts. He had learned certain facts from young Beach which would serve the purpose he had in view.

His first move was to go to the hotel where young Beach lodged.

He went up to the young man's room. He was not there.

The detective went to the office, and learned that Wilbur had not been seen since the previous day.

CHAPTER XII.

Our hero left certain instructions with the hotel people, and then went forth. He spent the day seeking for the man Strouse, and he muttered:

"If I can only find that fellow, and draw from him his story, I think a great deal of light will be thrown on this mystery."

During the brief colloquy on the night previous, which ended so disastrously as far as our hero was concerned, the latter had taken little notes of observation, so as to be able to identify his man, and he would have been able to do so under almost any conditions; but he did not have the chance. He could not get on to his man.

Toward evening our hero met Jack Sheppard by appointment. The young man had little to report. He had not seen Leighton go in or out since the preceding day.

"Is he in his house?"

"I saw him go in late last night, and then I went to sleep."

"You did not see him come forth again?"

"No."

"He may have done so early this morning?"

"It is possible."

"At what hour were you first up and around?"

"I overslept myself and did not get around until late."

"Jack, have you any idea that the man has ever heard that you have been watching him?"

"I think not; but it is certain he knows some one has been watching him; and between you and me, some one is watching."

"Oh, yes, I have been watching him."

"But there is some one else watching him. I've seen a man lying around. At first I did not suspect his purpose, but last night I made up my mind that a man was really watching Leighton's house."

"How many times did you see the man?"

"I've seen him around, now that I recall, six or seven times."

"Do you believe he ever entered the house during Leighton's absence?"

"I never saw him go into the house."

It was about midnight when our hero appeared in the vicinity of the old frame house. He had been lying around near by for some time previously, and at midnight he approached the house and boldly knocked at the door.

There came no answer, and the detective waited a reasonable time and knocked again. Still there came no answer, and then he knocked in such a manner that it would be impossible for a person to be in the house and not hear him. And, as it proved, his last rap brought a response. There came a voice from the inside—a voice that sounded like that of a very old man—and the inquiry came:

"Who's there?"

"Open the door. I have some business with you."

"I can admit no one into my house at such an hour as this. Go away and come to-morrow."

"I must see you."

"If you do not go away I will summon an officer."

"I am an officer," came the announcement.

There followed a moment's silence, and then came the answer:

"Well, officer, if you have business with me, you must come to-morrow; I will see no one to-night."

The detective took hold of the knob of the door and gave it a wrench, and the man inside called out:

"Be careful! A man's house is his castle. If you force an entrance here, you will do it at your peril!"

"Ah! that's your game, eh?" exclaimed the detective; and he gave one of the panels of the door a violent kick, and then there came a call, saying:

"Hold! or I will open the door, and you will, later on, take the consequences of this intrusion!"

"All right. Open the door."

The door was opened, and the detective stepped inside.

The man held a lamp in one hand, and his other hand rested upon his hip-pocket. He fixed his eyes upon Harry, and said:

"You told me you were an officer."

"I am an officer."

"You speak falsehood. But I warn you I am prepared."

"That's all right. But I am an officer—I am a detective."

"Let me see your shield."

The officer exhibited his shield, and the man said:

"Come this way."

He led the way into the front room of his house; he took a seat, and fixing his eyes on the detective, said:

"Now, what is your business with me?"

"You need not be in a hurry," said the detective.

"This is an outrage. You may be an officer, as you claim, but you have no right to force yourself into a man's house."

The man Leighton still assumed the rôle of an old man.

The detective pretended to fix his eyes on him keenly, and at length said:

"You are taking a good deal of trouble."

"You will learn that I shall take a great deal more trouble in order to have this outrage set right."

"When you go to work about it, what explanation will you make?"

"What do you mean?"

"My good friend, where is your half-way house?"

The man glared.

"What do you mean?"

"You have not answered my question. I asked you where your half-way house could be?"

"I do not understand your question."

"I will help you to do so."

"Proceed."

"You have been under surveillance."

The man gave a sign of annoyance and surprise.

"Who has been performing the meddlesome job?"

"I have, sir; and I have made several discoveries."

"May I ask why I have been under this surveillance?"

"I will tell you later on; but I will let you know now what I have discovered."

"What have you discovered?"

"I have discovered that you are playing under a disguise."

The man leaped to his feet, and the detective said:

"Take it easy; do not get excited; I can prove all I say. You are under a disguise now. You may as well drop it. You are not an old man; you are a young man, too young to hang; but I think you will, all the same."

The man turned pale, but said:

"This is all a conspiracy, part of a plan to annoy me."

The man suddenly drew a revolver, and exclaimed:

"I will protect myself!"

"Put up your gun mighty quick, my friend, or you are a dead man!" came the warning, with the additional declaration: "I've had a bead on you ever since I entered this room. I know you are a bad egg."

"This is terrible!" ejaculated Leighton.

"Terrible experiences come to all law-breakers, sir."

"I am not a law-breaker, and I demand that you leave this house. I believe you are an impostor. I do not believe you are an officer."

"If you desire it, I will summon a regular patrolman. Indeed, I may, anyhow, ere we part. I tell you now, if I do not get a satisfactory explanation, I shall arrest you."

The man actually writhed; the perspiration broke out upon his forehead.

The detective continued:

"You have had things all your own way, but now some one else has stepped in."

A moment the man appeared to consider, and then said:

"You have been watching me?"

"I have."

"And why have you been watching me?"

"Because it has been discovered that you were working under a disguise. You appear here as an old man; you go forth and work a change, and appear as a young man. The latter is your real character."

"I have good reasons for going under a disguise."

"Undoubtedly, reasons satisfactory to yourself; but how about the public? Do you know it is a very suspicious circumstance for a man to go under a disguise?"

"I know it is, sir; but I can give you the most satisfactory reasons."

"Do so."

"At some future time I will; for the present you must accept my word."

"I will not accept your word. How is that?"

"But you must."

"The Judge may not be willing to do so."

"Do you threaten to arrest me?"

"Certainly."

"I tell you now that you will do so at your peril, for when forced I can fully explain."

"You had better make up your mind that you are forced now."

"I will tell you this much: I go under a disguise as a matter of safety."

"Oh, that is possible. Your own safety?"

"Yes, my own safety; but I am guilty of no crime. It is not the police I fear. I have an enemy, a bitter enemy, a man who would not hesitate to take my life—a bloodthirsty, desperate villain who would come upon me unawares."

"Who is the man?"

"If I were to tell you, you would be no wiser."

"I know all the criminals around here very well. It is more than likely I would know your enemy."

"I can not name him."

"You must."

"It is my own matter."

"Your statement is no explanation, and is simple in the face of the suspicion under which you rest."

"Of what am I suspected, sir?"

"You are suspected of murder," came the answer.

CHAPTER XIII.

This detective had expected to see his man go to pieces when in his quick, sharp, driving way he declared: "You are accused of murder!"

The man, however, instead of betraying fear, merely laughed, and said:

"Then I must have an accuser?"

"Yes, you have an accuser."

"It is evident my enemy has been in communication with you, sir."

"No; your enemy has not been in communication with me."

"Then who is my accuser?"

"Your accuser will be produced at the proper time."

"Who is supposed to have been my victim?"

The man spoke in what might be termed a jocular tone.

"You appear to take the matter very easy?"

"I do."

"You may change your attitude."

"My friend, let me tell you something: there is a mistake somewhere."

"Your name is Leighton?"

"I have never sought to conceal my name."

"Where is the young lady Ethel Page?"

Again the man laughed, and said:

"Now I know you are laboring under a mistake."

"Did you ever know a young lady named Ethel Page?"

"I did know such a lady."

"Under what conditions did you know her?"

"I met her once or twice."

"Under what circumstances?"

"My brother is her legal adviser."

"Where is your brother?"

"Somewhere in Europe, I believe, with his charge."

"Does your brother resemble you in appearance?"

"He does. We are twins."

"And Miss Ethel Page is his client?"

"Yes; I believe he is her guardian in some way."

"But the girl is dead?"

"She is."

The detective fixed his eyes upon the man.

"You know all about her death?"

"I do."

"It is of her murder you are accused."

The man laughed again.

"You appear to look upon the accusation as a joke."

"I do."

"Was her body sent to you?"

"I do not understand your question."

"The body of Ethel Page was seen in this house."

"Sir, some one has been making a fool of you."

"Will you come with me?"

"I can not leave my house."

"I do not wish you to leave your house. I wish you to go down to your own cellar."

The smile faded from the man's face, and he said:

"I believe you are a lunatic."

"I will prove you a lunatic or a murderer," was the answer.

The man considered a moment, and then said:

"All right; we will go down to my cellar; but, mark me, I am prepared for any trick."

"You do not fear a trick. You know why I wish to go down to the cellar."

The man rose and took his light, and led the way to the cellar. Once down-stairs, the two men stood a moment gazing upon the spot where there had been a hole which was now covered in.

The detective looked around. He could see nothing of the coffin. He pointed to where the excavation had been, and asked:

"What is buried there?"

The man did not appear much discomposed, but answered:

"A coffin."

"What is in the coffin?"

"Nothing."

The detective was getting a little confused. There was a twinkle in the man's eyes. He did not appear to be at all afraid.

"Who buried it there?"

"I did."

"What became of the body?"

"There never was a body in that coffin."

"Do you suppose I will accept your word?"

"You can do as you choose."

"Are you willing to open the grave?"

"I am willing that you shall open it. I am not prepared to dig myself."

"You admit there is a coffin there?"

"Certainly."

"For argument's sake, I will accept your statement. Why did you bury an empty coffin there?"

"I had a purpose."

"What was your purpose?"

"I had use for the coffin. I was through with it, and to save talk and comment, I buried it there."

"What use did you put it to, my friend?"

"I do not know as I am bound to tell you."

"You are bound to tell me. I am an officer, and you must know that your admissions are very strange, and need full explanations."

"I do not feel in the humor to make explanations."

"You would prefer to make them to the prosecuting officer of this county?"

"You do not mean to arrest me?"

"I shall unless you make full explanations."

"I will," came the assurance.

The detective began to feel a little shaky as to his original theories. The man did not act like one who had committed a crime, and his peculiarity was quite suggestive.

"We will go upstairs," said Henry.

"Will you not open the grave?"

"That can be done any time."

"You will be better prepared to understand my story if you satisfy yourself that there is an empty coffin there."

"I do not feel like digging to-night."

The two men returned upstairs, and our hero said:

"Now tell me your story."

"What do you wish me to tell?"

"I desire satisfactory explanations of the fact of your having lived here some months under a disguise. I want you to explain why you buried an empty coffin in your cellar. Your acts are strange, and suggest the gravest suspicions."

"First tell me how much you know, and why you came here at midnight."

"I did not promise explanations. You are the one who is to explain."

The man appeared to meditate a moment, and then said:

"There are reasons why I must bind you to a promise of secrecy."

"That is all right."

"There are parties involved who do not desire notoriety. We did not expect that we should invite explanations."

"If there have been no criminal deeds you can rely upon my discretion."

"I must have your promise."

"You have my promise, provided, as I said, your revelations do not suggest a crime."

"There has been no crime committed. I will declare I am surprised as to your having any knowledge of the facts."

"I await your explanations."

"I have a twin brother. He is a lawyer. Some years ago one of his clients died, leaving an only child. He left a small amount of money—a few thousands—less than ten thousand, I believe. He and my brother were friends, and he made my brother his daughter's guardian and trustee of her estate."

"My brother took the girl to Europe, where she attended school, and when her education was completed, he went over, and started with her on a trip over the Continent. He went as much for his own amusement as for her instruction."

"In Italy he was the victim of a mistake, and his ward met a young man—an artist—a crazy fellow, penniless and worthless as far as the realities of life are concerned."

"This young fellow fell madly in love with the young lady, and he started a regular hunt after her. He imagined that she loved him, and his attentions became persecutions. Indeed, the annoyance was carried to such an extent that in the city of Paris my brother was compelled to apply to the police, and the young man was finally hunted out of Paris."

The detective listened with a great deal of interest; and we will add a suspicion did run through his mind that he was listening to the truth. The young man's story had been a remarkable one. The circumstances, as he related them, were possibilities, but not probabilities. On the other hand, the story, as related by Leighton, bore the impress of probability.

"How did you get rid of him in Paris?"

"Through the wit of a French detective. As I have stated, the young fellow's attentions degenerated into positive persecutions. He haunted the house where she lodged. My brother changed his abode several times, but the young fellow, with the cunning of a madman, hunted him down, and at length he became a terror. My brother feared that the fellow might do the girl bodily harm, and, as I stated, he appealed to a Paris detective. The latter provoked the madman into a pretended duel, and it was made to appear that he had killed the man, and he fled from Paris. That is the story."

CHAPTER XIV.

"ONLY a part of the story," said our hero.

"Yes, I mean only a part of the story. My connection with it I am to explain."

"Where is the young man now?"

"Here is here in New York."

"Then you have seen him?"

"Oh, yes; and he is the cause of the seeming mystery that you think you have uncovered. I received a letter from my brother. It is necessary for him to return to New York. He knew the young man was living in this city, and he wrote to me and told me to scare the young fellow away. He proposed a plan, but I decided to act on a plan of my own."

"Your brother proposed a plan. What was his plan?"

"My brother proposed that I should assume the rôle of a detective, and make the young man believe that he was being pursued by the friends of the man whom he thinks he killed in Paris."

"Did you try that scheme?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I thought I could work up a better one—yes, a scheme that would dispose of him finally."

"And what was your scheme?"

"I determined to convince the young man that the girl was dead, and then I determined to induce him to go away; and, believing her dead, I concluded he would never return to annoy her again."

"How did you proceed to carry out your scheme?"

"I am an expert in the making of wax figures, and I devoted myself to the making of a startling representation of the young lady. I manufactured a coffin, and put the young lady's counterfeit in the coffin. In the meantime, I had prepared the young man to expect her death, and when all was ready I brought him here one night and showed him, as he believed, the dead face of the girl."

"It was very cunning scheme," said the detective.

"Yes; but I fear it has proved a failure."

"You think it has proved a failure?"

"Yes."

The detective was thoughtful a moment, and then asked a puzzling question:

"You are very skillful in making wax figures?"

"I am."

"And you sought to convince the young man that the girl was dead?"

"Yes."

"Why did you seek to convince the young girl that the young man was dead?"

The question was evidently a puzzler. The man Leighton turned pale, and there was a perceptible tremor in his voice, as he asked:

"What makes you think I sought to make the young lady believe the young man was dead?"

"You do not answer my question."

"It is now my turn to ask a few questions."

"Well?"

"How much do you know, and how did you get what information you possess?"

"What difference does it make as concerns what I know?"

"It makes considerable difference."

"Have you met this young man of whom I have been talking?"

"I will give you what information I deem proper later on. Will you answer my question?"

"This is not your first visit to this house," said Leighton.

"What makes you think so?"

"I know some one was here."

"And why do you think that some one is myself?"

"You knew about the coffin and the grave in the cellar."

"Well?"

"Some one was down in that cellar. Whoever it was committed a burglary."

"How?"

"They carried off two wax figures."

"Ah! then you made two wax figures?"

"I did."

"Why did you make the second one?"

"I merely practiced on that."

The answer to the detective's question was not altogether satisfactory, and he asked:

"Do you know a man named Strouse?"

Again Leighton betrayed considerable agitation. The detective knew that his shots were plowing up the ground.

"I do not know a man named Strouse?" came the answer.

"Have you heard of such a man?"

"I have."

"From whom?"

"My brother."

"Is he an actor in any way in this little life drama?"

"This man Strouse was in Paris. In some way he got on to the secret concerning the detective's trick in regard to the duel. He visited my brother and demanded money, threatening to see the young man and inform him how he had been duped."

"And did your brother give him money?"

"No; and now the man has turned out a bitter enemy, and I can see how you got all your information; and you will run amuck if you believe all that man tells you."

"I have a second statement to make," said the detective. "Your brother is now in New York. Possibly it is news to you."

The man glared.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"You heard what I said; your brother is in New York: at least, the young lady is here."

"If she is I know nothing about it."

"And do you expect me to believe the ridiculous story you have told me?"

"You can do as you please."

"But your own action in living here under a dual character?"

"That is a matter of my own. My reasons for living under a disguise have nothing to do with the other matter we have been discussing. But will you answer me one question: have you seen this man Strouse?"

"I can not say that I have; but I have seen a man who tells me he has seen Ethel Page here in New York."

"I will pay a large sum of money to any man who will point out Ethel Page to me here in New York."

"You will?"

"I will; and now, sir, I will give you a pointer. You appear to have got on to a little family history—you can make money."

"How?"

"My brother paid a detective in Paris to aid him. He will pay a detective here in New York. He will pay handsomely."

"How do you know?"

"I am authorized to act for my brother."

"The girl's fortune, you say, is only ten thousand dollars or less?"

"Yes."

"Why is your brother so willing to spend a large sum of money?"

"He feels bound to protect the girl."

"I am to conclude that your brother is a rich man?"

"He is a very rich man."

"How old is your brother?"

"He is a man of about thirty-five."

"Is he married?"

"No."

"Hum!" ejaculated the detective.

"Ah! I see; you think my brother loves his ward."

"It is possible."

"Yes, it is possible. I can not deny the charge; but I do not believe it is true."

"What is your belief?"

"I believe the girl is infatuated with this mad, penniless artist."

"Do you know of any reason why the girl should not marry the young man?"

"I do not. But suppose my brother has reasons that are fully satisfactory? One thing is certain: the artist is a crazy man. I know that, and it would seem there is a good reason for it."

A change was coming over the detective's view of the whole affair.

Some further talk passed between Henry Brand and the man, and finally the detective said:

"Your story about the wax figures I know to be true, but there are some other matters as yet unexplained. I must consult with parties who may be able to give me some information, and I will see you later on."

The detective rose to go, and the man said:

"I am willing to aid you, sir, in any way I can."

"How can you aid me?"

"I will write to my brother. He may come on to New York."

"It would be a good idea for your brother to come on here."

"Yes, sir; and if he comes, he will bring Miss Page with him, and she will in person be able to dispose of the story of her having been in New York."

The detective departed to his own home, and on the way he indulged considerable thinking, and he finally remarked:

"There is something wrong here. That man is a very cunning fellow. His statements to me were very plausible, but there are circumstances that lead me to doubt some of them. I must capture that man Strouse. I reckon he can solve the difficulty."

CHAPTER XV.

On the day following the occurrences we have detailed, the detective went to the hotel and learned that nothing had been seen or heard of Wilbur Beach. Henry determined to make an investigation. He made special inquiries of the clerk as to when he had last seen the young man, and the clerk said:

"I do not remember having seen him for two days."

"Did he have any visitors?"

"Yes. Come to remember, there was a lad called here with a note."

"When?"

The clerk named the time, and upon comparing notes, the detective fixed the hour as about the time the young man had been last seen. He ascended to the floor on which the young man's room was situated, and looked up the maid who had charge of the rooms on that floor. Henry said to the maid:

"When did you last see the young man in room Number —?"

The maid flushed up, and said:

"I don't remember having seen him at all."

"You know he has not been in for a couple of days?"

"I do."

"Where do you think he can have gone?"

"How should I know? Maybe he has returned to his home."

The detective looked the maid over and read her character. He saw that she was a quick-tempered girl, but good at heart, and above all things, a woman; and with his usual cunning he determined to win her over to his side; and he said:

"Poor fellow!"

"He did not look as though he were a poor fellow."

"He was homeless. He had no home but this, and he was pursued by bitter enemies."

"He was pursued by enemies?"

"Yes; and I fear."

"No harm could come to him, sir."

"I fear he is dead."

"Dead, sir?"

"Yes. I fear he has been murdered."

"Who could wish to kill a nice quiet young man like him?"
"He had very bitter enemies. But never mind; I will solve the mystery of his death."

The girl appeared to think a moment, and then said:

"There was a note brought to him."

"Yes; so I've heard."

"Do you think the man who sent the note murdered him?"

"Yes; that is just what I do suspect."

"You will not tell me?" said the girl.

"Certainly I will not repeat anything you may tell me."

"There was a lad brought him a note."

"What sort of a looking lad was he?"

"Oh, he was a boy off the streets. But I have the note."

"You have the note?"

"Yes, sir. I saw the lad go into his room, and after the young man went away, I entered the room to fix up, and I found a note lying on the bureau."

"Have you the note?"

"I kept the note, sir. It was merely an accident, but I have it."

"Let me see the note."

The girl drew a little missive from her pocket. The detective glanced over it, and read as follows:

"MR. WILBUR BEACH.—I am a stranger to you, but I can give you some very valuable information. You have been grossly deceived. I can explain many mysteries to you, and if you will grant me private interview, I can convince you of my identity. I have been seeking you for months. Meet me to-night at the foot of Twenty-second Street, East River. I must be secret, and meet you alone; but you can depend I will tell you many things to your advantage. I will wear a rose in my button-hole so you will know me. Let the hour be about five o'clock this afternoon. Do not fail to come, and do not consult with any one. I am your friend, and a foe of your foes, and I will sign myself simply
"STROUSE."

The detective read and reread the note, and finally muttered:

"This is very strange." And turning to the girl, he asked: "At what hour was it you saw the young man go away?"

"It was about four o'clock in the afternoon."

"Do not tell any one else what you have told me," said Henry. And he departed, with strange suspicions running through his mind.

When alone, the detective thought over the statements of the maid, and also the contents of the letter.

He proceeded to his office, and laying the letter on his desk, scanned it carefully and critically, and in the end he reached a conclusion by a series of reasonings that were acute and ingenious, and he muttered:

"I will easily prove or disprove my suspicions; but one thing is certain: I must find this man Strouse."

Henry had an appointment with Jack Sheppard, and in due time the lad arrived.

"You are not on time," said Henry.

"No; I've been doing a little detective work."

"Tell me about it."

"I discovered a man lying in wait around Leighton's house, and I watched him. When he went away, I followed him."

"Why did you follow him?"

"I thought you might want to know where the man hangs out."

"And did you learn?"

"No. He gave me the slip at the last moment."

"Describe the man."

The lad did so, but his description did not answer for the man Strouse, and the detective said:

"Halloo!"

"Do you recognize the man?"

"No; and it would appear that you have dropped to a new actor in this game we are playing. Repeat your description of the man." Jack did repeat his description, and it was very minute, and, as it afterward proved, very accurate. The youth was a keen little fellow, and displayed great powers of observation.

"You go back and lay on the watch; if anything turns up, report to me. But are you sure you saw the man that night?"

"Yes, I am sure. Do you think I am blind or that I was dreaming?"

"No; but it seems queer that he should have disappeared."

"I saw him."

"All right; keep your eyes open and do not fail to report."

Half an hour later the detective entered the Fifth Avenue Hotel. He proceeded along the great entrance hall, his keen eyes flushing to the right and to the left, and he studied with a glance every face he met. He reached the bar-room and glanced around, and finally he crossed the hall and entered the reading-room, and lo! there sat the man whom Jack had so accurately described; and what was still more remarkable was the discovery made by the detective—the man was the mysterious Strouse.

We have said that the detective took notes of the man so as to be able to recognize him under any disguise, and although the man Strouse was well and even handsomely dressed, our hero fell to him at a glance.

Having sighted his man, he stood a moment and considered how he should bear down on him.

"I do not wish to scare the fellow off," he muttered.

The detective went away and worked a transform. He did it quickly, and returned to the reading-room. He looked like a respectable, middle-aged man. He took a seat near Strouse, and for some time the men sat side by side.

Strouse appeared to be merely amusing himself by watching what was going on around him.

Finally the detective changed his position and fixed his eyes on

the man, and it was not long before the man Strouse discovered that he was undergoing a strict survey, and he appeared to be annoyed.

Finally our hero tried the old game—a game which is played every hour of every day almost, sometimes as a game, and often a real sincerity. He said, addressing Strouse:

"I beg pardon, sir; but I think I've seen you before."

"You are mistaken," came the answer.

"I do not think I am."

"Well, suppose you have seen me before?"

The man spoke sharply, and looked the detective straight in the face.

Henry was meditating how he should answer, when the man drew his chair closer, and said:

"I've a word of advice for you, my friend."

"I am always ready to accept advice."

"That's good; and I'll give you good advice. Don't attempt to come any of your games over me. I am an old New Yorker; I'm a native here. I've seen you fellows before, and know your tricks; so do not annoy me, or I'll make a scene here by warming your ears for you."

"You are a very savage man; but you can not scare any one."

"I'll scare you if you give me any impudence."

The two men were speaking in very low tones.

"I sympathize with you, my friend, on general principles," said Henry; "but would it not be well for you to learn first whether or not I speak the truth?"

"Do you intend to persist?"

"I said I had seen you before?"

"You did."

"If I can not satisfy you that I tell the truth, you can kick me out of here. How is that?"

The man eyed our hero, and after a moment, said:

"Dare you say you are not seeking to play me for a flat?"

"Yes, I dare say I am not seeking to play you for a flat."

"And do you tell the truth when you say you think you have seen me before?"

"Yes; and I can prove I have seen you before?"

"Do so."

"Let us go over there in the corner."

"On one condition. You will understand that if I discover that you are seeking to play me, I will warm your ears, no matter what the consequences may be."

"I accept the condition," said Henry, with a smile on his face.

The two men changed their positions and took a seat in a corner, and our hero said:

"I see you are a very excitable fellow. If I say anything to startle you, I do not want you to go off with a rush."

"That's all right."

"You think I am a sharp?"

"I'll be frank with you. That is just what I do suspect."

"I can convince you to the contrary in about three seconds."

"All right."

"But I want you to take things easy. I am going to say something very startling. Don't haul off, and give me one in the neck, even though you may think yourself insulted."

"You had better not insult me."

"If I tell you something startling, as I promised, all I ask is that you wait for explanations, that you take things easy. Do not talk loud, so as to attract attention. We will keep our business to ourselves."

"Let me tell you one thing: do not seek to make sport of me."

"When I speak, you will learn that my communication is not of a 'sporting' character."

"All right; proceed."

"You will keep cool?"

"I will."

"I will explain, remember."

"I will await your explanations."

"That is all right; and now to prove that I am not a sharp, and that I am not joking, I will tell you what I think you are."

"Let's have it."

"I think you are a murderer!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE man half rose from his seat, his eyes shot forth a fierce light, but he did not speak; he merely gazed in amazement.

"Take it slow," said the detective.

The man speedily recovered his composure, and a smile ran over his face as he said:

"You'll swear you are not crazy? You solemnly affirm you believe I am a murderer?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you give an alarm? Why don't you call an officer and have me arrested?"

"I want to make sure first that I am right."

"Listen, my friend: I warned you against joking with me."

"You did."

"And you believe I am a murderer?"

"Yes."

"Whom do you think I murdered?"

"A young man."

"This farce has gone far enough," said the man to whom our hero was talking.

"We will talk it out, sir."

"If we do, you will give me some substantial grounds for your absurd declarations?"

"I will."

"Do so."

"The young man I believe you murdered is—or was—a young artist."

The detective had been closely watching his auditor's face while talking, and when he said, "A young artist," the man's face assumed a ghastly hue.

He fixed his blazing eyes upon the detective, and there was a wild look of amazement in them.

The detective remarked:

"You know now that I am not fooling."

"Who are you?"

"We will come to that."

"Yes, we will come to that, and at once."

"No, not at once. We will open up the whole business step by step. I say I believe you are the murderer of a young artist. It is quite a serious charge to make."

"That is true. Will you tell me the name of the young man I have murdered?"

"Not yet."

"That's hard. You should certainly tell me the name of my victim."

"You know to whom I allude."

"I do not; and I do not know who you are. It is possible you are some escaped lunatic."

"You do not know me?"

"No."

"We may as well start right?"

"Yes."

"I will let you into my secret."

"Do so."

"I know you."

"Who am I?"

"Your name is Strouse."

The man sat and gazed like one suddenly stricken with paralysis, and for a full minute the two men sat and gazed into each other's faces. It was Strouse who first spoke.

"You have made a mistake," he said.

"Oh, no; you are too experienced a man to tell me that. If you are not Strouse, why did you get so white around the gills when I named you?"

"Did I turn white?"

"Your face is like a dead man's now."

"Well, stranger, I will explain why I look like a dead man."

"Do so."

"I am not Strouse, but I know a man named Strouse."

"Then I beg your pardon, sir. I have indeed made a mistake, and I recall all I have said to you. The man I took you for is named Strouse, and this man Strouse is the fellow I believe who murdered the young artist. If you are not Strouse, and I am bound to accept your word, as I said, I recall all that has been accused."

The detective arose as though about to go away.

"Hold on," said the man; "sit down."

"I beg your pardon, the man I desire to talk with is Strouse."

"I will tell you something, sir. Strouse is a friend of mine. I am deeply interested. Anything you may have to say to Strouse you can say to me."

"I've nothing to say to you. My communications must be made to Strouse."

"Why to him?"

"He may offer explanations. I have a revelation to make to him."

There followed a moment's silence, and then the man said:

"If you will make your revelations to me, I may bring you and Strouse together."

"It will not do. I must talk with Strouse."

"Hang you! I am Strouse; go ahead," came the announcement.

A smile played over the detective's face, and he asked:

"Do you take me for a fool?"

"No."

"I've told you my revelations must be made to Strouse."

"And I tell you I am Strouse."

"How shall I know you are Strouse? Within a minute you denied and then admitted it. One or the other of your statements is untrue."

"I am Strouse."

"You must prove it."

It was Strouse's turn to smile, and he said:

"You have intimated that Strouse is a murderer—that he murdered a young artist?"

"Yes."

"Do you suppose I would claim to be Strouse, after you had accused the same Strouse of murder, unless I were indeed the man?"

"It happens," said our hero, "that I know you are Strouse. I would not take your word."

"Then why are you acting a part?"

"I desired that you should admit that you were Strouse, that's all. I forced you to the admission."

CHAPTER XVII.

The detective laughed in a low, aggravating tone.

"I am half inclined to knock you over," said the man.

"Don't attempt it."

"Will you tell me who you are?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"You would not remember ever having seen me before."

"Have I?"

"Yes."

"When and where?"

"We will come to that presently."

"And what does all this mean?"

"I want to ask you a few questions."

"You promised me a revelation. Make good your promise."

"Later on. First I desire to ask you a few questions."

"I will answer no questions."

"Yes, you will."

The man glared, and said:

"You assume a great deal."

"Certainly I do. I know the man I am dealing with."

"Possibly you do not."

"I'll take the chances. And now answer me: Do you know a man named Leighton?"

Strouse made no answer, and the detective sat and gave him time.

"I wish we were in a less public place," came the answer.

"Why?"

"I'd take you by the throat, and compel you to tell who you are."

"I propose to tell you who I am."

"Then when your time arrives I will answer your question."

"Do you know a young man named Wilbur Beach?"

The man again maintained silence, and the detective said:

"I do not care whether you answer or not. I know you are acquainted with both the parties I have named."

"Go on."

"Do you know of a young lady named Ethel Page?"

"Go on," said the man.

The detective saw that the man Strouse was a very cunning fellow and a very stubborn chap also, and he made up his mind that in order to get him to speak there would have to be a little opening up on his part, and he said:

"I am not afraid of the man Leighton."

"Who's friend are you?" came the question.

"I am the friend of Wilbur Beach."

There came a strange look to the face of Strouse, as he repeated:

"You are a friend of Wilbur Beach?"

"Yes."

"Who is Wilbur Beach?"

"He is the young artist I think you murdered."

"When did you see him last?"

The detective thought it best to answer the man's questions as far as he could, and said:

"A few days ago."

"And you are his friend?"

"I was his friend."

"You say he is dead?"

"No; I did not say that."

"Did you not say he had been murdered?"

"No."

"What did you say?"

"I said I feared he had been murdered."

The man was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"I wish you could convince me that you are his friend."

"I can do so."

"Convince me, please."

"I am a detective officer," was the answer.

There followed a moment's silence, and then Strouse said:

"And you believe he has been murdered?"

"I have reason to suspect that he has been murdered."

"Are you certain that he is dead?"

"Frankly, I am not."

"What interest have you in the young man?"

"If you will tell me whether you know him or not, I will answer your question."

"I have never seen him."

"You know of him?"

The man did not answer.

"Come, Strouse; I think if you and I were to come to an amicable understanding, we would find that we are working on the same lines."

Strouse looked the detective straight in the face a moment, and then said:

"You look like an honest man."

"I am."

"But you are under a disguise."

"So are you."

"I am not."

"Then you have been travelling under cover."

"Ah! I see," said Strouse. "You are the man who has been on my track for the last few days."

"Yes, I have been on your track."

"It's strange," came the musing answer, "that you should have been on my track."

"Why is it strange?"

"I do not know how I have become known in this matter."

"When we come to a full understanding, I can explain it."

"Does the young man Beach know of me?"

"He has heard of you."

"From whom?"

"I still say we must come to a better understanding."

"I am a friend of the young man Beach."

"And the man Leighton?"

"He is a villain."

"He is the guardian of Ethel Page?"

"He is."

"Is he in New York?"

The man looked at the detective in a puzzled manner.

"You know he is in New York."

"Why do you say I know he is in New York?"

"You admit having trailed me?"

"Yes."

"Then you know that Leighton is in New York."

"Leighton, the guardian?"

Again the man gave the detective a puzzled look, and he said:
"What is it you are driving at now?"
"Answer my question."
"Are you acting in the interest of the man Leighton?"
"No."
"Your question is a strange one."
"Why?"
"If Leighton is in New York, Ethel's guardian must be here."
"Then there is but one Leighton?"
"What are you getting at?"
"Are there two men named Leighton?"
"No."
"Then I have been lied to, sir."
"Be whom?"
"Leighton."
"Did he tell you there were two Leightons?"
"He told me he had a brother."
"And that his brother was the guardian of Ethel Page?"
"Yes."
"If he told you that he did lie to you."
"Come, we are getting along nicely now. Let there be positive frankness between us."
"Take me into the presence of Wilbur Beach. Let him tell me that you are his friend, and I will speak as frankly as you wish."
"I can not take you into the young man's presence. Indeed, I may need your help to find the young man."
"How can I aid you?"
"I have reason to believe that you saw him last."
"I never saw the young man."
"I have positive proof that you were in communication with him. I have reason to believe that you were the last man seen in his company."
"It is not true."
"Oh, certainly, under the circumstances you would deny it."
"Under what circumstances?"
"I have proofs that you are not telling me the truth."
"This is all nonsense."
"I can prove what I say."
"Do so."
"I will in good time."
"I see through your game. You are in the pay of Leighton."
"I will convince you to the contrary."
"I wish you would."
"And if I do?"
"I will open up; that's all."
"If you are a friend of the young lady and of the young man, you will open up anyhow."
"Bah! This man Leighton is very smart. He has employed you; but I do not care. Let him work his game. I will close in on him in time."
Henry Brand stared. A fresh suspicion ran through his mind, and he said:
"I think I catch on."
"Ah! it's about time you did."
"You and I will come to an understanding?"
"When?"
"You have played it pretty well."
"Have I?"
"Yes; but you are not jealous, I know."
"No, I am not jealous. Why should I be?"
"I told you I was a detective?"
"Yes."
"Do you believe it?"
"I have no reason to doubt it."
Our hero smiled, and said:
"That's all right; and now let me tell you something: You are detective also, and you may as well open up at once."
The two men sat and gazed at each other a full minute in silence; and there was an odd smile on the face of Strouse; and finally he said:
"So you think I am a detective?"
"Yes."
"And you claim to be a detective?"
"Yes."
"If you are a detective, and I am a detective, how is it we do not know each other?"
"We will know each other later on."
"You ask me to open up. Why don't you open up? Why don't you admit that you are in the employ of this man Leighton?"
"Simply because I am not in his employ. And now let us get down to business."
"But I rest under an accusation. You have accused me of being a murderer."
"I have good grounds."
"Give me the proof, and then we may talk."
The detective drew from his pocket the letter that had been sent to the young man Wilbur Beach. He passed it to Strouse, and said:
"Read that."
Strouse took the letter and read it through carefully; and while reading, his brows knit, and there came a fierce light in his eyes.
"What does this mean?" he demanded at length.
Our hero had probed deep enough and well enough to know that it was safe to talk. He was satisfied that Strouse was a detective, that he possessed many facts, and that he was not a friend but a foe of the fellow Leighton. He knew he could talk frankly, and he said:
"Did you write this letter?"
Strouse merely smiled.
"You know I did not write it," came the answer.

There came a look of deep solicitude to the face of Strouse.
"That letter was delivered to Wilbur Beach."
"Under what circumstances?"
"It was sent to him. The young man must have obeyed the summons. He has not been seen since."
There came a very decided look of solicitude in the eyes of Strouse, and after a moment, he said:
"I did not write that letter."
"I believe you," asserted Henry Brand.
"And you fear young Beach has been murdered?"
"You have the evidence as I have it."
"That letter was a trick. But one man could have written it."
"And who is that man?"
"Why ask me? You have already settled the matter in your own mind."
"We are getting along pretty well."
"Yes; we are now opening up."
"But you are to aid me?"
"I will—possibly. But tell me all you know."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HENRY BRAND had already made up his mind as to what he would do, but he said:
"You have not answered my questions."
"I may later on."
"Do you admit that you are an officer?"
"I do."
"And you know Leighton?"
"I've seen him."
"You know the girl Ethel Page?"
"I've seen her."
"You know the young man Beach?"
"I've heard of him."
"You have never seen him?"
"No. I have been seeking him. And now, will you tell me how you came into this case?"
"I got upon the track of the man Leighton."
"How?"
"From the fact that he was playing a double rôle."
"And did you not know his game?"
"I did not. I can not say that I do now, but I suspect his game. I was led to take him under a shadow, and in time discovered that he was up to some sort of a conspiracy. I had to watch him, and in so doing got upon the young man Beach."
"Then he has been in communication with Beach?"
"Yes."
"I wish I had known it. But proceed."
"I had a talk with Beach, and he told me his story."
"What did he tell you?"
The detective repeated in substance the narrative of Wilbur Beach, and when he had concluded, Strouse said:
"The young man told you a true story."
"Yes. I believed his story; but I have had a talk with Leighton."
"What did he tell you?"
"Let me first say that by an ingenious trick Leighton led young Beach to believe that Ethel was dead."
"But what story did he tell you?"
The detective repeated in substance the narrative of Leighton, and Strouse remarked:
"He is a cunning devil."
"Yes, he is. And you say the story is false?"
"It is partly true, as you know, because it partly confirms the narrative of young Beach; but he showed up the facts under a different light."
"Yes, I can see that he did. You say he is really the guardian, and he has no brother?"
"He has no brother."
"He has a scheme, and you know his scheme?"
"I do."
"Will you not be as frank as I have been?"
"I will presently. But tell me, how did he convince young Beach that the girl was dead?"

Henry Brand related the trick.
"A shrewd game it was," remarked Strouse.
"Yes, it was a shrewd game; but is he now playing a shrewder one?"
"How?"
"If you did not write that letter, who did? That is the question," came the answer.
"You have a suspicion," said Henry Brand. "Whom do you suspect?"
"Leighton."
"Would he have a motive in murdering the young man?"
"Yes."
"Then I fear that Wilbur Beach has been made away with by this man."
"I do not think it is as bad as that," answered Strouse.
"Where is young Beach, then?"
"Ah! there comes the question; but if you saw him, as you say, alive and well a few days ago, I believe he is alive yet, simply because I do not think Leighton would commit a murder."
"You have a better opinion of him than I have. But now tell me how it is you are in this case?"
"I will later on."
"That won't do, old man. I want you to open up."
Strouse was thoughtful a moment, and then said:
"Although I believe you are an honest man, I must have absolute proof that you are not in the employ of this man Leighton."
"Do you think I have been deceiving you?"

"No."
"What then?"
"I must be positively assured, that's all."
"I am Henry Brand. You can go and make inquiries about me."
"Why not accept the fact that I am all right?"
"Suppose I do?"
"Then we can go to work."
"And do what?"
"Find this young man Beach."
"And if we find him?"
"Then we will try to find the girl."
"Ah! is she missing?"
"She is."
"Do you suspect that any harm has come to her?"
"No."
"You are her friend?"
"Yes."
"All right; I am the friend of young Beach. You work your end of the game, I will work mine."
"But we can work together."
"Not much. I do not work in the dark."
"How are you working in the dark?"
"I have opened up to you, but you tell me nothing. That's all right, you can do as you choose; but you and I do not work together."
"Will you tell me how you came to know of me?"

Our hero thought a moment, and then proceeded and told what Leighton had said to young Beach, and how he had followed up the clews and had reached his conclusion.

"Your explanation is perfectly satisfactory."
"I am glad; and we will stop at that."
"No, we will not."
"Then you will tell me your story?"

"Yes, I will."
"Proceed."

"Mr. Page was a lawyer here in New York. He inherited a large fortune, and married a lady who was also very rich. The lady was an orphan, without any close connections, and she held her property in her own right when she married the young lawyer Page. She died when Ethel was six years of age, and left all her property in trust to her husband for her daughter. Mr. Page was madly in love with his wife, and her death affected him greatly. He had, in his office as a law clerk, a young man named George Leighton, and this Leighton was seemingly a model young man, and had the full confidence of his employer. Mr. Page became aware that he was afflicted with the symptoms of a terrible disease, and he made a will. The conditions of that will I do not know; but I do know that Leighton was constituted by the terms of the will guardian of Ethel Page."

"Is Mr. Page dead?"

"Yes, he is dead, and his daughter is heiress to an immense estate."

"Proceed."

"I was acquainted with Mr. Page; indeed, I am a sort of second cousin to his daughter Ethel."

There came a thoughtful look over the face of our hero as he realized the possibility of a future complication, and Henry asked:

"Was Ethel acquainted with you?"
"Yes; she had seen me once or twice."
"Proceed."

"About six months ago, I received a letter asking me to come to Paris."

"Who was the writer of the letter?"

"A French woman."

"Did you know her?"

"No. It was a very mysterious letter. It merely asked me to come to Paris, and gave out the intimation that I might be of great service to a friend and relative. The latter was at least two months in reaching me, as the writer did not have my address."

"And you went to Paris?"

"I did, immediately."

"Did you suspect the identity of the party whom you were to save?"

"Yes; but I was not then aware of some of the facts that I have stated to you. I arrived in Paris in due time, and sent a note to the address as recorded in the letter I had received; and the following day I received a note asking me to meet a lady in the Palais Royal. I went to the place as directed, and met a veiled lady. She questioned me very closely, and then told me that I was to meet her that night, and she would take me to meet the lady. I was to aid. I met her, and a romantic adventure followed."

CHAPTER XIX.

CONTINUING his story, Strouse said:

"Yes, quite a romantic adventure followed. I met the lady, according to appointment, at ten o'clock, at the entrance to the Palais Royal, and she said to me:

"You are a man of courage?"

"I answered that I'd like to prove my bravery; and she said:

"You may have a chance."

"She led me to a house on the Champs Elysees, directly opposite to where the famous Monte-Cristo was supposed to have once resided. I was led to a room on the first floor, over the store, which was located on the ground floor. I was bid to wait. I took a seat in a bay-window overlooking the avenue, and had been there about ten minutes when a lady entered the room. I recognized the lady at a glance. It was Ethel Page. I had not seen her for several years, and she had grown into a beautiful woman. I advanced toward her, and she demanded:

"Do you recognize me?"
"I do," I answered; and she said:
"You are my relative."
"I said I was."
"My only relative that I know," she said.
"And I will aid you if you need my aid," I assured her.
"I do need your aid," she said.

"She proceeded and told me a strange story. She told me that her guardian held her fortune; that he had absolute control over it; that he was seeking to compel her to become his wife, and threatened that, if she did not, she would never come into one penny of the money left to her by her father."

"Was she of age?"

"She was not then. She is of age now. She proceeded and told her story, and the story told to you by the young man Wilbur Beach is true. Ethel confessed to me her love for the young artist—told me she would marry him and sacrifice her whole fortune rather than marry the man George Leighton."

"I do not believe she will sacrifice a dollar," said Henry.

"And so I told her. She asked me to find Wilbur Beach. She feared he was dead. I promised to discover the young man if I could. I was to see her again."

"And you did?"

"No, I have not seen her from that hour to this. When I left the house I proceeded along the street, and I was thinking over the revelations of the girl, when I received a blow upon the head and fell to the ground unconscious. When I recovered consciousness, I found myself on a seat near the old exposition grounds, and one of the police was aiding me. I waited the next day to hear from Ethel, but no word came. I waited two days, and then visited the house, but Leighton and his ward had disappeared. I started in as a detective, and I traced them to London, and afterward to Liverpool and New York, and about two weeks ago I located George Leighton; but as to the whereabouts of Ethel I do not know."

There followed an interval of silence, and then Henry Brand said:

"What has been your purpose?"

"I have been watching that man. I wish to locate the whereabouts of Ethel."

"And if you find her?"

"I shall take her from the custody of that scoundrel. I will compel him to produce the will. She is now of age, and he has no control over her person. I do not believe he has over her estate."

"Do you know that Ethel believes the young man is dead?"

"Possibly Leighton has told her he is dead."

"He has shown her his dead body."

The detective told the story of wax figure Number Two, and stated his belief as to the purpose for which the thing was made, and then he asked:

"You were not seeking for Wilbur Beach?"

"No."

"You did not know he was in New York?"

"No. Of course, during my interview with Ethel, she told me many facts I have not deemed it necessary to repeat, but she gave me very full particulars."

"I am glad you confided in me."

Henry Brand related many additional facts to Strouse—facts that are known to our readers—and when he had concluded, he said:

"We can run that man into a corner."

"We can."

"Does he know you are in New York?"

"I think he does now."

"Why do you think he would not commit a murder? Did he not attempt to murder you?"

"No; I think he only intended to disable me."

"I believe that man is capable of any crime."

"It does appear that he has inveigled young Beach."

"He has, certainly."

"What is your opinion of the young man?"

"He is a handsome and noble young fellow. I do not wonder that Ethel is in love with him."

"I have not thought much about that matter, all I was determined to do was to rescue her from this man and then consider her love affair afterward."

"We must find the girl. If she is in New York and living, we will find her. But who is to be captain?"

"You are."

"If I am to be captain, you must leave the whole matter to me."

"We can find out about the will?"

"Oh, yes; but that is an immaterial matter at present. We must find the girl and young Beach."

After some further talk, the two men separated, agreeing to meet on the following morning.

Henry Brand had worked his shadow well, and he determined to bring matters to a settlement.

What had appeared at first as one of the very strongest of mysteries had been explained in a most conventional manner; but there was a possibility that, after all, a tragedy might be committed under the seeming conventional incidents.

In thinking the matter over, our hero determined that the man Leighton had the girl Ethel concealed somewhere, and he was determined to find her. He did not worry concerning her safety, but he did feel considerable uneasiness as concerned the possible fate of the young man Wilbur Beach.

The idea that he had killed himself had been dispelled, the discovery of the letter purporting to be signed by Strouse proved that he had been inveigled, and what had befallen him was still an unsolved mystery.

Before the morning following the incidents recorded, the detective went to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, where he was to meet Strouse. He found that gentleman awaiting him.

"I am glad you are here," said Strouse.
"What have you new?" asked Henry.
"I desire to hear what your plans are."
"We must find the girl."
"How will you do it?"
"I believe the man Leighton has the girl hidden somewhere here in New York."

"That has been my idea all along, and I have been watching his movements. When you discovered me hanging around the old frame house, I was carrying out that plan."

"Did you ever get a clew?"

"No; but I have now a clew to something: that man has discovered that I am in New York, and that I am on his track."

"What has turned up?"

Strouse passed a missive to Henry Brand, and the latter read as follows:

"If the man to whom this note is delivered wishes to obtain valuable information, he will be on the wharf at the foot of — Street to-night at the hour of midnight. The writer must be unknown, but for pay will betray a villain."

"What do you think of it?" demanded Strouse.

"Excuse me, and permit me to ask what you think of it?"

"It is a scheme to get me out of the way."

"Have you noticed anything peculiar about that note?"

"No."

Henry drew from his pocket the missive that had been sent to Wilbur Beach. He handed it to Strouse, and asked:

"What do you think now?"

Strouse examined the letter, and after a moment there came a bright look of intelligence to his face, and he said:

"That vindicates me."

"How?"

"I see what you mean. The two notes were written by the same person."

"You are right."

"What shall we do?"

"That depends upon your nerve."

"I think you will learn that I have plenty of nerve."

"Wilbur Beach, as you see, received a decoy letter, and it is evident that he responded to it."

"Yes."

"He has not been seen since."

"So you say."

"It is possible he is alive; and if so he has been kidnapped."

"I see."

"They may mean the same game for you."

"Certainly."

"If this man is once married to the girl Ethel, he can snap his fingers. He need not care then who may be on his track."

"That is true."

"He has made the girl believe that young Beach is dead, and in sheer despair she may marry this man."

"It is possible."

"If they abduct you, they may take you to the same place where Beach is now secreted."

"That may be their game."

"It is evident that this man has others aiding him."

"Yes; paid agents."

"It would be simple matter to knock a man on the head, put him in a boat, and carry him away."

"And drop him in the river," said Strouse.

"Between us two, I do not believe they mean murder. It is not necessary at present."

"I see what you desire me to do. I must go, and take the knock on the head."

"Well, yes."

"I'll do it, although it is possible I may receive a closing out rap; but it makes no difference. I am in to run this man down. I will take my chances."

"That may not be necessary."

"Why not?"

"We may send a dummy in your place."

"No need. I will take the chances. I can look out for myself."

"It will be necessary, in order to carry out my plans, that the man who represents you shall be captured."

"They can make a prisoner of me."

"You will know that friends are on their track."

"Oh, yes! I see what your plan is; and I will act my part."

"We will talk it over later; and in the meantime, I will go and have a talk with this fellow Leighton. I will meet you here at noon."

CHAPTER XX.

The detective proceeded direct to the little frame house. He knocked at the door, and after a little was admitted by Leighton.

"I am here again, you see."

"And I am glad to have you call and see me."

"You are glad? Why?"

"I have an idea that you and I may become friends."

"If we do," declared Henry, "you will have to be more truthful than you were when last we met."

"You would imply that I had sought to deceive you. I told you nothing but the truth."

"I know better."

"What do you suspect?"

"I suspect nothing. I know."

"What do you know?"

"That you attempted to deceive me. You told me you had a brother."

"It is true."

"I have been investigating you since last we met."

There came a worried look to Leighton's face.

"It may be true that you have a brother, but it is not true that your brother is the guardian of the girl Ethel Page; neither are you."

"Yes, I am," came the answer; and the man, seeing the smile upon the detective's face, recognizing that he had put his foot in it as the saying goes, corrected himself, and said: "I mean it is true that my brother is the young lady's guardian."

"You were her guardian, but now she is of age."

"Who told you this nonsense?"

"One who knows all about it."

Leighton recovered his composure. He laughed, and said:

"Ah! I see. What fool has been talking to you?"

"What fool?"

"There is a man, a crazy loon, who imagines he is a relative of Miss Page. He has caused me considerable annoyance."

"It appears that every man who causes you annoyance is a crazy loon, to let you tell it. I suppose you look upon me as a crazy loon. Now, listen to me, Mr. Leighton; I know your game; you can not carry it through."

"What game am I playing?"

"I will put it in another form. You will never be the husband of Miss Page."

The man appeared to be thoughtful a moment, and then said with a laugh:

"I could tell you something that would make you open your eyes."

"Possibly, if I were disposed to believe your statements."

"I will permit you to question my veracity simply because you are an officer; but because you think you know a great deal, and do not know anything of the real facts, you have been grossly deceived and fooled."

"I admit that you fooled me for a time; but you can not fool me again. I have got you ciphered down pretty well."

"You think I deceived you?"

"Yes, I do."

"I had a right to deceive you."

"How?"

"You were meddling with what did not concern you, sir. I am the guardian of Miss Page."

"No, sir; you are not. She is of age now."

"I'm her legal guardian, all the same, and in a few days the truth will be established. There were reasons why I desired for a season to keep a certain matter a secret. There is no reason now. The lady who was formerly Miss Page is now Mrs. George Leighton. Go tell that to your informant, and you can so inform the crazy fellow Wilbur Beach."

"You claim the lady is your wife?"

"Yes."

"Then why do you live here, while she lives somewhere else?"

"I will admit that my wife for a season was laboring under a delusion; but that delusion has been dispelled. She was engaged to marry me. She met this fellow Beach, and he did turn her head. She now knows what an escape she had."

"In the death of Wilbur Beach?"

The man smiled, and said:

"You can take that view of it if you choose. I am no fool; but one thing is certain—the matter is settled now."

"Why do you not openly proclaim your marriage?"

"My reasons for not doing so concerns no one but myself."

"I suppose you mean to wait until Wilbur Beach shows up?"

"I have nothing to do with the fellow Beach now."

"I've a little point to give you. Do not proclaim your marriage until he does turn up, or I will step in."

"You talk in riddles."

"I will speak plainly. If Wilbur Beach does not turn up within a few days, I will arrest you."

"On what charge?"

"The charge of murder."

When the detective made the declaration, he had his eyes fixed on Leighton. The latter did not wince nor betray any alarm, but said:

"You will cause me to class you with the others."

"You may change your mind."

"You can arrest me for murder as soon as you please."

"I may conclude to do so; and if I do, you will be compelled to produce Wilbur Beach in order to prove your innocence."

"What nonsense!"

"You may think it nonsense, but I have proofs of your crime—yes, sir, absolute proofs."

"I challenge you to produce your proofs."

"I will produce them at the proper time, unless you do one thing."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Introduce me to the lady who you say is your wife."

"In a few days I will do so."

"Mr. Leighton, take my advice, and draw back while you have a chance."

"I am not obliged to you for your advice. I consider it a piece of impudence."

"It matters little what you consider it; trust my words. As you will not bring me face to face with the lady, I will bring her face to face with you."

Henry Brand was a keen fellow, and when he spoke, he knew just what he was talking about every time.

"You will bring her face to face with me?" the man Leighton repeated, slowly.

"Yes, I will."

"If you have any warrant for my arrest, do your duty; if you have no warrant, go off about your business. I do not care to submit further to your insults."

Our hero meditated a moment, and then said:

"You admit that you attempted to deceive me?"

"I admit nothing."

Henry rose and advanced to the table. There lay upon it a piece of paper on which was some writing.

The detective took up the paper. His manner made it appear that he did it unconsciously; but as he raised the paper, he cast upon it a quick glance, and he had one proof.

"I see this is a letter from your brother."

"You can assume it is a letter from my brother."

"Possibly it is a letter to your brother."

The detective had not appeared to look at the letter, and he held it crumpled in his hand.

"You had better read it," said Leighton.

The detective glanced at the letter. It was merely a memorandum; and Leighton said.

"If you had half an eye, you would see the writing is fresh."

"There is another person in this house?"

"You had better search."

"If you are alone in this house, you wrote this."

"There is no secret about it—I wrote it."

With a smile of triumph upon his face, the detective placed the bit of writing in his pocket. The man observed the look of triumph and the disposition of the partly completed memorandum, and suddenly there came a perplexed look to his face.

"You will not take that, sir?"

"I certainly will."

"This is an outrage. I will not submit to it."

"What will you do?"

The man was silent a moment, but later said:

"Very well, do as you choose; but the day and the hour will come when you will repent these insults to me."

"I will await the day and the hour with impatience. In the meantime, I bid you look out. I am on your track now."

The detective left the room, passed out the door, and went his way. At noon Henry met Strouse, and to him he said:

"It is all plain enough now. Look here."

The detective passed over the bit of writing. Strouse glanced at it, and asked:

"Where did you get this?"

"From Leighton; and he acknowledged it was his handwriting."

"Then one fact is established: we know who wrote the other two notes. What did he have to say?"

"Oh, he was defiant. I accused him of knowing the whereabouts of young Beach."

"What did he say?"

"He denied all knowledge of him, of course; and he did more. He claimed that Ethel Page was his wife."

Strouse gave a start, and after a moment said:

"That is what I feared. If he has married the girl, he is a winner, and she is his victim."

"We have no proofs that he has married Ethel."

"If he had not married her, he would not claim it."

"That is where you are wrong. And now I've a surprise for you. I do not believe he knows where the girl is."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I believe she has escaped from him."

"But the wax figure?"

"It may have been made with a purpose, and never used. Yes, I believe the girl has escaped from him."

"And what shall we do?"

"We will institute a search. If we find the girl, we are done with Leighton, as far as she is concerned."

"And how about Beach?"

"We will find him, dead or alive."

"Then you think I had better respond to the letter I received?"

"Certainly, if you have the courage."

"You need not doubt my courage. I will go."

The two men spent a long time talking over their plans, and then separated. At eleven o'clock they met again, and after some further talk, Strouse started to go to the wharf to get his knock on the head.

CHAPTER XXI.

HENRY BRAND had discovered that the man Strouse was a very brainy and nervous fellow, and he felt that he could trust him to carry out any plan they might agree upon.

Strouse had received full instructions, and had been prepared for any emergency. Henry Brand was also prepared against any desperate attempt that might be made.

The men were in consultation, and finally, as stated, Strouse started to receive his knock upon the head. It was a very dark night. The stars were veiled above dense clouds, and Strouse arrived at the trysting-place on time.

He went out upon the wharf and waited. Some little time passed, and he saw no one, and finally he was led to question whether or not the missive he had received was not a guy instead of a decoy. Another half hour passed.

The man looked at his watch under the light from the dock-lamp. It was fully one half hour past the time appointed. He was debating in his mind whether or not he should wait any longer, when he heard the splash of oars, and a little later a man ascended to the dock.

Strouse came out into full view as the man stood looking around, and finally the latter approached. He looked Strouse all over, and then said:

"You were to meet some one?"

"You are mistaken," was the answer. "Some one was to meet me."

"I reckon I am the man who was to meet you. Your name is Strouse?"

"That is my name?"

"I was to meet you."

"How am I to know you are the man?"

"I can convince you. You received a note."

"Well?"

"The writer of the note promised you certain information. What more proof do you want?"

"I want the information."

"You shall have it. You wish to find a young lady?"

"You appear to know my business pretty well."

"I do, in that one direction."

"How did you obtain your information?"

The man pretended to glance around furtively, and then said

"From the young lady herself."

"What did she tell you?"

"She told me she desired to see you."

"What is the young lady's name?"

"You know well enough."

"We are not dealing in what I know. You are to give me the information, if you are the writer of the note I received."

"I am the writer of the note."

"Then you can tell me who the young lady is who desires to see me."

"The young lady is Miss Page."

"I know such a lady. Where is she now?"

"I am to take you to where she is."

"How do you know I wish to go?"

"The lady has sent for you, and you are her friend. You will go to her rescue."

"Where will you take me?"

"I have a boat here."

"And you expect me to go into a boat with a perfect stranger at this hour?"

"Yes; why not?"

"There are many reasons why I should not."

"What is the matter?"

"I am cautious."

"The lady is in trouble."

"She is in trouble?"

"Yes; and she expects you will rescue her."

"From whom?"

"She will tell you all about it."

"My friend, do you know this is all very suspicious?"

"How?"

"The young lady can not come to me; she is under durance, according to your story, and yet she can communicate with you, and you are her friend, I suppose?"

"I am."

"Why do you not rescue her? You appear to be a likely sort of a fellow."

"She will explain all the circumstances to you."

"Why do you not explain them?"

"I am a betrayer."

"You are a betrayer?"

"I am—yes; I am acting a treacherous part in the young lady's interest."

"You are treacherous toward whom?"

"The man who holds the lady in durance."

"Who is the man?"

"My employer."

"And why do you betray him?"

"My sympathies have been aroused in favor of the lady."

"And where will you take me?"

"To the Long Island shore."

"I'll tell you what I will do: you go and bring the lady here."

"I can not do that."

"And you expect me to go with you?"

"The lady expects you to come to her."

"What guarantee have I that this is all right?"

"My word."

"You forget you are a stranger to me."

"But I have given you information that must be satisfactory."

Strouse pretended to consider a few moments, and then said:

"My friend, you have need to be careful. I am on my guard. I will go with you."

There came a smile to the man's face. Strouse had approached close to him, and was peering in his eyes when he uttered the warning and said he would go.

"We will go at once," said the man.

"Remember, I go with you because you tell me a lady desires to see me."

"That is all right."

The two men walked down the wharf, and there found a boat.

They entered the boat, and the man who was acting as guide took the oars. He shoved his boat out on the water, and commenced pulling.

The man headed his boat toward Greenpoint, and had almost reached the opposite shore, when a boat was seen approaching them.

The rower rested on his oars, looked toward the approaching boat, and in a terrified tone, said:

"I have been discovered."

"By whom?"

"The man who holds the lady a prisoner."

"What will you do?"

"I must trust to you."

"What can I do?"

"You will claim that I was taking you over to a gentleman—a man whom I know nothing about."

"Will they believe me?"

"They may want to test your story, and will insist upon taking you into their boat."

"This is a pretty scheme you have worked, mister."

Strouse had just uttered the words, when the two boats came together, and two men leaped from the other boat into the one where Strouse sat. They did not utter a word, but quickly seized the passenger; and the latter, being taken, as it appeared, by surprise, offered no resistance. He was bound quickly, and then he asked:

"What does all this mean?"

The men laughed, and one of them said:

"It was a neat job."

"I have been betrayed!" ejaculated Strouse.

"Well, I should think you had!" came the response.

There were four men altogether.

"What does this outrage mean?" demanded Strouse.

"Ah! you will learn soon enough."

The men all laughed, including the man who had met our friend Strouse on the dock.

"Will you men explain what this means?"

"It's all right. You were to meet a lady?"

"I was under the conduct of that man."

"He was your conductor, eh? Well, it's all right; you have three conductors now."

"You rascals will repent this outrage. It is an abduction."

"Is it? Well, we want to know."

"You will know some of these days."

"Ah! you are getting spunky, eh? Well, let it out, old man. You will feel better to jaw a little. That is the reason we don't muzzle you; but mind, if you talk loud, we'll close your speaker."

"Will you tell me what this means?"

"Certainly. You are meddling with what doesn't concern you, and we are going to give you a chance to meditate over the virtue of minding one's own business and attending to one's own affairs."

The boat was being headed toward the mouth of Newtown Creek, a dirty stream that empties into the East River.

"You men will be sorry, I tell you."

"We are sorry now, but we can't help it. If you had attended to your own affairs, you would not be here now. But you need have no fear. No harm will come to you. We just mean to keep you out of the way for a year or two, that's all. You have been found guilty, and Judge Lynch has ordered that you be kept in solitary confinement. Do you appreciate my frankness?"

"Will you tell me who my accuser is?"

"Well, not this evening; some other evening."

The boat was rowed up the creek, and finally run in to the shore. One of the men stepped to the land, and the question was put to Strouse:

"Will you go along easy, or will you make trouble?"

"There is no need of my attempting to offer resistance against three scoundrels."

"Well, that's a good view to take of the situation."

Strouse was assisted from the boat and led to a house which stood close to some large works. He was led into the house, and lights were procured, and the men sat themselves around.

Strouse was perfectly cool. He knew that he had been betrayed. Indeed, he had expected to be, and he was really getting off better than he had anticipated. Thus far no violence had been offered him, save that, as stated, he had been bound hand and foot. He was asked if he would have a drink, and he declined. A few moments passed and the men left the room, and a man, whom Strouse at once discovered was disguised, entered.

"Well, sir," said the man, "I have got you at last."

"I have not the honor of your acquaintance, you villain!"

"Be careful; do not call me a villain."

"You are at the bottom of this outrage."

"I suppose you will claim so, and it's no use for me to deny it."

"But why have I been subjected to this outrage?"

"For meddling in matters that do not concern you. And now let me tell you something: your life is at stake."

"Is it, indeed?"

"Yes; and unless you do act right you are a doomed man."

CHAPTER XXII.

STROUSE was taking in his surroundings, and he had reached a certain conclusion. In answer to the man's declaration, he said:

"You have taken great chances, my friend."

"Have I?"

"Yes; and you did not consider when you started out just who you were dealing with."

"Is that so?"

The man spoke with the well-known drawling emphasis which, under certain circumstances, is so aggravating.

"You will find it is so."

There came a sound, and Strouse said:

"Thus far you have had it about your own way, haven't you?"

"Yes; I think I have."

"I desire to ask you a few questions before I answer any more of yours."

"Go ahead."

"Who are you, and what is your game?"

"My game is to teach a meddler like you to mind his own business."

"Have I mixed in anything that does not concern me?"

"Yes."

"And you are interested?"

"I am."

"Then I need not ask who you are, I know."

"One word, you had better not announce who I am."

"Why not?"

"It will go hard with you. Yes, your own safety demands that you should be ignorant as to my identity."

"Then I have nothing more to say."

The disguised man uttered a signal, and two men entered the room.

"Take this man down to the vault," came the command.

The two men stepped over beside Strouse. The latter rose quickly to obey when commanded to arise, and his alacrity appeared to bother the man who had given the order. He said:

"You appear very willing and ready to obey."

"Certainly; you have it all your own way at present; my turn will come presently."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say: my turn will come presently."

The man looked puzzled, but he said:

"Away with him. He will have changed his tune when next we meet."

The two men had a masked lantern. They led Strouse down the stairs. He found himself in a large cellar divided into numerous vaults, and he saw at once that the building had been a sort of storage house. He was led into one of the bricked compartments and was thrust into a regular cell. He offered no resistance, and one of the men remarked:

"You take it cool, boss."

"Yes; I am investigating; that's all. This is all in my line. You chaps are carrying out my scheme first-rate."

The men did not understand his words, and upon returning upstairs reported what Strouse had said. The man to whom his words were reported appeared very much perplexed, then he muttered:

"What can the man mean?"

There came a voice saying:

"I reckon I can answer your question."

The leader of the abductors turned and beheld a stranger who had entered the apartment. He gazed in amazement, and finally asked:

"Who are you?"

"I am an old friend; and by the bye, what are you up to, Leighton?"

The man actually recoiled, but exclaimed:

"You are mistaken."

"Oh, no, I am not mistaken. Have you been murdering another man?"

Leighton turned pale, as the truth appeared to flash across his mind.

"You are the detective who has been annoying me?"

"Yes, I am the man who has been watching you. Where is the man you inveigled into this house?"

"Seize this man!" commanded Leighton.

The two men leaped forward, but were downed so quickly it appeared as though they had been struck by lightning. It was with a club that our hero, Henry Brand, had downed both men.

"Don't you wish to take a hand in?" he asked of Leighton.

The man stood trembling and dumfounded.

"I think I've got you all right now, Mister Man."

The two fellows who had been knocked down crawled bleeding from the room. What became of them will be explained later on; meantime, Leighton stood speechless.

"Come, old man, I reckon I've got the bulge on you now. How is your wife? Is this where you keep her?"

"You villain, this has gone far enough."

"That is what I think; but, hang it, I've got you in a nice place, eh?"

"Fool! You will learn that you have gone too far."

"I reckon you forget."

"I forget nothing. I have permitted you to annoy me, but now I will show my teeth."

"And I will show my teeth also," was the reply.

The two men gazed at each other a moment in silence. There was an amused smile on the face of our hero, and a discomfited expression rested upon Leighton's evil face, and he was the man who first spoke. He said:

"Your pursuit of me is very remarkable."

"No man knows better than yourself that it is all in the way of business."

"All in the way of business?" repeated the man Leighton.

"Yes, sir. I am a detective."

"That is what you have previously declared."

"You are a criminal, and I am on your track; that's all."

"You have something to learn."

"I am learning something every day. I've learned a heap tonight. Yes, sir, to-night has brought a confirmation."

"In what respect?"

"I suspected you were a villain, a criminal, and now I have the proof."

"Will you explain?"

"Why am I here?"

"Simply because you are a meddler."

"Oh, that is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are not a quick thinker. Where is the man who was inveigled here by you?"

Leighton shuddered, and did not answer.

"He told you that you had it all your own way, and he told you the truth; and now I will make a little revelation to you. We played a game against you."

Leighton appeared to come to a sudden resolution, for he uttered a whistle.

"You can blow like a whale, old man, but it will do you no good. I did not come here alone. I came well prepared. Blow again."

The man Leighton stood aghast.

"I will whistle," said the detective; and he did so, and Strouse sauntered into the room.

Leighton continued to gaze aghast.

"How do you like it?" demanded our hero.

"Ah, I see! this is a conspiracy."

"Ah, yes; it was a deep-laid conspiracy when you sent a note to this gentleman, asking him to meet you on the wharf; it was a part of the conspiracy when he was inveigled into a boat; it was a continuation of the conspiracy when he was made a prisoner, and bound, and finally placed in your vault. That was your conspiracy; and now I will tell our little conspiracy. We knew what you were up to. We arranged our plans. We had witnesses all through. Our witnesses are officers. When they testify, it will be the testimony of men employed to watch criminals like yourself. So, you see, we've got you dead to rights as an abductor, a man who stands guilty of a crime which means from five to ten years in prison. Do you wish to send word to your wife as to the scrape you are in?"

Words can not describe the changing expressions that came over Leighton's face. The rascal saw that he had been neatly tricked.

"Your *confrères* are all handcuffed, my friend, and every one of them is ready to confess in order to escape. So, you see, it was no idle boast when I told you we had you dead to rights. It is true."

Leighton evidently realized that he was indeed in a bad plight, and after a moment, in a very humble tone he asked:

"What would you have me do?"

"It is not for you to act. We can do as we please; or, in other words, we must do our duty as officers. There is but one course for us."

"Can we not compromise?"

"What do you propose?"

"I will make it all right with you gentlemen."

"How?"

"I have not really committed a crime. I did not mean that any harm should come to that gentleman."

The fellow pointed toward Strouse.

"Then why was he subjected to this treatment?"

"I felt that he was interfering with me. I wanted to teach him to let me alone."

"You speak of a compromise?"

"I do."

"You can compromise."

"I am ready."

"You may not be so willing when I mention my terms."

"Let me hear your terms."

"My terms are a full confession, and a righting of the wrongs you have committed."

"I have nothing to confess."

"That is bad for you. Where is the young man Wilbur Beach?"

"I know nothing concerning Wilbur Beach?"

"Where is your wife?"

The man made no answer, and Henry added:

"Ah! I see my terms for a compromise do not suit you. I did not think they would. And am I to understand that you committed no crime when you abducted this gentleman and sought to confine him in your vault?"

"I committed no crime. It was a joke, merely intended as a scare."

"Then you will not consider it a crime if we put you in your own vault, and keep you there until such time as we see fit to let you out. It will be only a good joke."

"You dare not commit such an outrage."

"Oh, it is an outrage, eh? You have changed your mind; but suppose you consent to the confinement?"

"I never will."

"Listen; it may be your best choice."

"Will you explain?"

"Certainly, it is your choice. You are either confined there, or you are turned over to the authorities and confined on another charge."

"You can turn me over to the authorities as soon as you choose," came the answer.

"You prefer lodgment in jail in preference to a temporary confinement in your own vaults?"

"You have a design. What is your purpose?"

"I am determined to find the young man whom you either murdered or kidnapped, and then I propose to find your wife and hear her story of the marriage."

There came a terrible look to the eyes of the man Leighton, and in a calm, defiant voice he said:

"You are a devil, but you can not overawe me. Proceed and do your worst. I defy you, and in the end you will suffer."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The detective smiled, but he did not fancy the man's attitude. He did have him, as he declared, dead to rights, but he did not dare to win the man over for his crimes. He had hoped to frighten the fellow into a full confession. He discerned, however, that the man Leighton was a deep thinker, and he had evidently grasped the situation.

"I can do as I please?"

"You can. I defy you."

"I may choose to let you go for the present."

The man made no reply.

The detective stepped from the room, followed by Strouse, and the latter asked:

"What will you do now?"

"We will go away. One fact is established: neither Ethel nor Beach is confined in this house."

"No."

"We will let him alone and lay for him."

"And he will escape."

"No; if he succeeds in making the girl his wife he will defy us."

"Then you conclude that he has not succeeded?"

"I feel certain he has not."

"How about the young man?"

"Wilbur is beyond all question his victim."

"Do you believe he has done away with him?"

"No; he is in a vault here somewhere."

"The man has covered his tracks well."

"We will see about that. But come, we will go."

The detective did not return to exchange any more words with the man Leighton, but proceeded to the creek, where he had a couple of boats moored.

Leighton, meantime, stood expecting the return of the detective; but after a half hour had elapsed he started to leave the room, when he was met by a man.

"Halloo! where have you been all the time?"

"I've been released, and I've been laying low."

"Where are the rest of the men?"

"Two of them have skipped; but your man Thompson is a prisoner."

"And the other men are free?"

"Yes."

"How did it all happen?"

"It appears that Thompson was the only man they wanted."

"Have they taken him away with them?"

"Yes."

"Why him alone?"

"They did not stop to make any explanations; but I have my suspicions."

"And what are your suspicions?"

"I reckon they think Thompson can give them more information than any one else."

Leighton gritted his teeth.

"Curse that man!" he muttered.

"What does it all mean, sir?" asked the man.

"I have no explanations to make."

"There is one thing you understand, sir; you are to indemnify us. If any harm comes to us, you must get us clear."

"You can depend upon me. You need not fear; you shall be well rewarded within a few days."

"It must be within a very few days, sir, or I shall see what I can do with the other side. I am on to this business a little, and I expect to be well paid, or there will be trouble; that's all."

"You need not fear; I will make good every promise."

"That's all I've had so far—promises. I want to see something substantial pretty soon, and I must, or there will be fun; that's all."

Leighton was a terrified and perplexed man, for reasons that will be made plain later on. In the meantime, our hero had entered his boat, and he and his party rowed over to New York. His aids were dismissed, and the man Thompson, whom he had retained as a prisoner, was taken to his own lodgings.

Thompson was the man who had met Strouse upon the wharf; he was the fellow who had inveigled him into the boat, and was, indeed, as far as was known, Leighton's right hand man.

When Henry Brand moved on the building, he made prisoners of all the men who had participated in the abduction; but, as has been indicated, when he departed he freed the other men and held Thompson alone as a prisoner. He had not spoken one word to the man, and the latter had maintained a sulky silence. He asked no questions and made no protests.

When the detective reached his lodgings it was well on toward daylight. He bid his prisoner sit in a chair, and after surveying him awhile, remarked:

"Well, my friend, you are in a nice scrape. Do you know who I am?"

"Yes, I do; you are a detective."

"Then you fully understand your position?"

"Yes."

"What have you to say?"

"Nothing."

"Do you know you can be sent up for a long term?"

"Yes."

"And still you have nothing to say. You will enjoy going to jail?"

"I can not help it. I took chances and I lost, that's all."

"You can help it."

"You need not preach to me."

"I do not intend to preach to you. I want to get you out of this scrape."

"You can do it easily enough. Just lead me to the door, open it, and say, 'Skip!' and I will skip, you bet!"

"That would be a pretty nice arrangement," said Henry.

"It would suit me."

"No doubt; but that is not the way I propose for you to escape."

"I thought not. What is your plan? I see you are my friend."

"You are a cool scoundrel!"

"I've made it the maxim of my life to keep cool under all circumstances."

"What are your relations with the man Leighton?"

"They have always been very pleasant."

"He pays you well?"

"I am not complaining."

"You can make a little more money, I think."

"How?"
"Come over to me."
"I reckon I am with you now," said the man, with a satirical laugh.
"You know what I mean. It's come over to me or go to jail."
"I am not complaining."
"Come, my friend, let us come to a full understanding. You are in my power; I've got you down fine; you are caught in a bad business. The evidence is dead against you. I will see that you get away if you will open up."
"You want me to betray my employer?"
"No; I want you to save your employer."
"How can I save him?"
"He is in my power. He can be sent up as well as yourself. If you will confess, you will save both yourself and your friend."
"What do you want to know?"
"I want to know where the young lady is."
"What young lady?"
"Leighton's ward."
"I do not know where she is."
"Where is the young man you abducted?"
"I did not abduct any young man."
"I said you could save yourself and your friend."
"Possibly my friend is better able to save me. You say he is in your power. Get your information from him."
"He will not incriminate himself."
"Neither will I, sir; and that settles it. You are wasting time with me."
"I told you that you could make some money."
"Let us understand each other. All the money in the world will not tempt me to betray a man for whom I have done a service."
The detective was disappointed. He had hoped to get the man to speak, but was reluctantly compelled to recognize the fact that he had failed.
"Come with me," he said.
The man obeyed.
The detective led him to the door, and pronounced the single word: "Skip!"
The man stood, and gazed agast.
"Hold on!" he said. "Do you really mean to let me escape?"
"Yes; I've no use for you."
"Can we talk further?"
"I've nothing to say. If you want to tell me anything, I am ready to listen."
"I did want to ask you a few questions."
"Go ahead."
"Let us return inside."
"Why," said the detective, "you are a regular canary. You will not fly out when the cage door is open."
"I am too confused to fly."
"How is that?"
"I do not understand the play."
"You will understand it some day."
"I know little about this man Leighton."
"I thought you were his confidential man?"
"He employed me to do one job."
"And what job was that?"
"To abduct Mr. Strouse."
"And who else did you abduct?"
"On my honor, I did not aid in the abduction of any one else."
"Do you mean to tell me you do not know Leighton's secrets?"
"I do."
"Why did you talk to me as you did inside?"
"I wanted to learn something about Leighton."
"He is your friend. Go and learn all you wish from him; and now skip. You asked for the privilege; you have it."
"I am not the first man who did not value a coveted favor when it came to him in the end."
"And you do not desire to go free?"
"Not just this way. I want to learn something, so that I can make a stake."
A moment the detective meditated, and then said:
"You have a hint as to the information I seek. You know who can furnish the information. When you have news to sell, come to me. Do you understand?"
"I do," came the answer, and the man skipped away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Our hero and Strouse held a brief consultation, and then separated, agreeing to meet at a later hour in the day.
Henry had been out on duty all night, and realized the need of a little rest, and it was late in the afternoon ere he arose and began to think over the situation. And after a long period of meditation, he said:

"I think I will put Strouse on the lay to discover the young man Bench, and I will devote myself to the discovery of the whereabouts of that beautiful young lady, the mysterious beauty who is the innocent cause of all this scheming and counter-scheming."

Henry sat looking at the photograph he had obtained upon the occasion of his first visit to the little frame house, when young Jack Sheppard was ushered into his presence.

"Well, Jack, I am glad to see you."
"I have been trying to see you for some time."
"You have some news?"
"I do not know as you will call it news; but it may mean something."
"Let's have it."
"Leighton has not been in the little frame house for the last twenty-four hours."

"I reckon I can account for his absence. But did he not show up this morning?"

"No."
"What other news have you?"
"A boy has been hanging around the cottage."
"What sort of a boy?"
"A pretty bright lad."
"What was he hanging around for?"
"I think he was hanging around to see Leighton."
"For what purpose?"
"I think he had a message for him."
"What leads you to the conclusion?"
"I tackled the lad. He would give me no information; but from his actions I was led to suspect as I have told you."
"Did he admit that he desired to see Leighton?"
"No; he would give me no satisfaction at all; but I was led to a conclusion all the same. I tried to get hold of him and go through him, but he got away from me."
"What was your purpose?"
"I thought he might have a note about him, and I wanted to get hold of it."
"If he had a note, whom would it be from?"
"I am not sure; but I have a suspicion that it would be from the mysterious young lady."
"I wish you had succeeded in going through him, Jack."
"So do I; but he was too much for me, and got away."
"Why didn't you follow him?"
"I did, to certain point, and then I lost him."
"Where did you track him to?"
"To Brooklyn. He went along by a row of houses, and I expected to see him enter one of them; but suddenly he vanished in the most mysterious manner."
"Did he enter one of the houses?"
"I can not say. I tell you, he disappeared in the most mysterious manner. I lay around the neighborhood for a long time, but did not see him again."
"Can you describe the appearance of this lad?"
Jack proceeded to describe the lad's appearance, and also described the locality where he had disappeared.
"I think I'll follow up the trail from where you lost it, Jack."
"You may succeed better than I did; but one thing is certain; I feel certain that lad had a message for Leighton, and that the sender of the message was the young lady."
"You have done well, Jack. I have something to work on."
A few moments later, Strouse appeared, and he and the detective arranged their plans. It was decided that Strouse was to lay for Leighton under cover, and watch his movements, while Henry Brand was to follow up the clew he had received from Jack Shepard.
It was late in the afternoon when Henry started for Brooklyn. He reached the locality described by Jack, and commenced an investigation.
He walked up and down the street, and was very patient. He recollects that good comes to those who wait, and he was prepared to wait, and finally saw a lady closely veiled leave a certain house and start to walk down the street.
She walked down Montague Street toward the City Hall; she crossed to Myrtle Avenue, and proceeded down that well-known thoroughfare, and the detective kept upon her track until she reached Bridge Street; then Henry, who was well acquainted with the localities in Brooklyn, exclaimed:
"Well, I guess!"
He had struck a conclusion, and a few moments later his suspicions were confirmed. The veiled woman proceeded to a well-known pawn-office. She walked by the place several times as though lacking courage to enter. But at length she appeared to summon sufficient resolution, and entered the place.
The detective was but a step behind her. She entered one of the booths, and, as good luck would have it, the proprietor of the place stepped forward to attend upon her.
The owner of the place is a rarity among men of his class and vocation. He is known to the police as a legitimate man. He is kind and honest, and does business strictly under the provisions of the law, and he is known to be very kind toward respectable people who are reduced to the necessity of seeking help.
"Well, miss," said Gentleman Sam, as he is called, "what can I do for you?"
The girl, with a trembling hand, produced a diamond ring, and asked in a low voice:
"How much will you loan me on this ring?"
"How much do you want?"
"All I can get," came the answer.
The pawnbroker was asking questions for a purpose.
"I will loan you twenty-five dollars," he said.
"If it really makes no difference to you, I will take thirty-five dollars."
The usual ticket was made out, the money paid over, and the lady started to leave the office. The detective followed her, and as she walked along he resolved in his mind how he should open up a conversation with her.
The lady did not take the same course in returning to her lodgings as she had taken when going to the loan office. She walked through Bridge Street to Willoughby, and instead of turning toward the City Hall, walked in an easterly direction.
"That suits," was the detective's comment; and he started up quickly, and upon reaching a locality where there were no people passing, he advanced, crossed the street, and hurried along until, recrossing, he came face to face with the lady.
He glanced at her, and became convinced that he had discovered the missing girl. Deciding upon his course, he turned again, advanced, and touched the veiled lady on the shoulder.

"I beg pardon," he said; "but can you tell me how I can find my way to Fleet Street?"

The lady trembled, and answered:

"I am sorry, sir, but I can not tell you."

"You will excuse me again, but is not this Miss Bentley?"

"No, sir; my name is not Bentley."

The girl was evidently very much scared.

The detective showed his badge, and the lady appeared greatly discomposed.

"You need not be afraid, miss. If you are Miss Bentley, I will not molest you further; but I must be assured that you are not the lady I seek. Will you remove your veil, and permit me to see your face?"

The lady instantly removed her veil, and the detective was taken all aback. He had been on the wrong scent; the veiled lady was not Ethel—it was a very plain-faced girl.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he said. "I see you are not Miss Page, the lady I seek."

The girl gave a start; her face became deathly pale. The detective had purposely made it appear that he had made a mistake. He had pretended to be seeking a Miss Bentley; but, as has been detailed, let slip the name of Page, and the effect was very suggestive.

There followed a moment's silence, and the detective again said:

"I see you are not the lady I seek. I am seeking a young lady named Page."

"Why do you seek her, sir?"

"I have a very important communication to make to her."

The young girl appeared distressed and perplexed. She meditated a moment, and then said:

"You told me you were an officer. You did not mistake me for a Miss Page. You said you thought I was a Miss Bentley."

"I did."

"Is it a Miss Bentley or a Miss Page you seek?"

"A Miss Page."

"Why did you say Bentley?"

"I got the name wrong."

"And you really wish to find a young lady named Page?"

"Yes."

A suspicion appeared to cross the lady's mind—a very natural suspicion—and she said:

"You have been following me?"

"I have."

"Why?"

"I saw you in the loan office."

The lady trembled violently, and asked:

"Why did you follow me?"

"I thought you were Miss Page."

"Then you are not acquainted with Miss Page?"

"I am not well acquainted with her; but I see you are."

"No, no."

"It is useless, miss, for you to deny the fact; and now let me tell you something; I am really a friend of Miss Page; I am very anxious to meet her. Can you aid me, and I will tell her something to her advantage."

"I do know a Miss Page; but she is not the lady you seek, I fear."

"Why do you think she is not the lady I seek?"

"The Miss Page I know resides in New York."

"That is the lady I seek. Her name is Miss Ethel Page, and it is very necessary, in her interest, that I should see her as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE young lady was thoughtful for some minutes, but at length said:

"Can you explain to me why you wish to see her?"

"You have a friend named Page?"

"Yes."

"She is dear to you?"

"As a friend—yes, sir."

"Then you will tell me where I can find her?"

"I will communicate with her, and if she desires to see you, I will let you know. Tell me your name."

"Miss Page would not recognize me by my name."

"I will not tell you where to find her until I have communicated with her."

"Is there any need why she should remain hidden from those who desire to see her?"

"If you know anything about Miss Page, sir, you know that such is the fact," came the answer in a quick tone.

The detective discovered that, although the girl to whom he was talking was timid and fearful, she was also very bright and smart, and he said:

"There is no reason why she should not see me."

"Who are you, sir?"

"I am an officer."

"Can you give me a hint as to the communication you have to make to her?"

"Yes, I can. I bring her a message from a gentleman named Strouse."

Again the girl was thoughtful, and again said, later on:

"I will communicate with Miss Page, and see you again."

"Where will you meet me?"

"Right here."

"When?"

"In two hours."

"Very well, I will meet you here in two hours. And now mark well my words: I am really a friend of Miss Page. I have

much to explain to her. I can be of great service to her. Tell her all this, and report back to me."

"I will do so."

The girl moved away.

The detective felt perfectly safe in thus agreeing to her proposition, simply because he knew just where to find her in case she did not meet him as agreed, and he thought it the best way to have Ethel informed as to the purpose of his desired meeting with her.

He was highly elated over his success. He stood for some time after the girl had left him, and then working a transform, started in an opposite direction, and by a roundabout way reached the vicinity of the house from which he had seen the girl issue to go to the pawn-office; indeed, he arrived ahead of her, and saw her re-enter the house.

The detective lay around for nearly two hours, and then saw the veiled girl leave the house, and he muttered:

"By gosh! I reckon it's all right. She is really going to keep her promise and meet me."

Henry Brand leaped on a car, and in due time reached the place where he was to meet his *incognito*.

It was late in the afternoon; indeed, the shadows of evening were falling. A few moments passed, and the girl appeared.

Our hero had changed back to the disguise he had worn when he first met her.

"I see you have kept your word," he said.

The girl appeared even more excited and nervous than she had been when he first met her.

"I am here," she said; "but I can give you no information."

"You can give me no information?"

"No, sir; I fear something terrible has happened."

"What has happened?"

"Miss Page has most mysteriously disappeared."

There came a smile to the detective's face as he said.

"This won't do, miss."

"Do you doubt my word, sir?"

"I know that it is to the young lady's interest to see me."

"I have been unable to communicate with her."

"You have? Why?"

"As I told you, she has disappeared—on my honor, sir, she has."

"Why not tell me she does not wish to see me?"

"I really believe that she would have seen you."

"And she has disappeared? Under what circumstances?"

"She went out, and had not returned by the time that I went to meet her."

"Do you know anything of Miss Page's history?"

"If I should say yes?"

"I might make a communication to you."

"If you will make a communication to me convincing me that you are really her friend, I will answer your question."

"I have been in communication with a young man named Beach—Wilbur Beach. Did you ever hear her speak of him?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish to communicate with her concerning him."

"You wish to tell her the circumstances of his death?"

"He was not dead when I saw him, four days ago."

The lady appeared to calculate, and then said:

"And he was alive and well then?"

"He was."

"This is a strange statement, sir."

"It is true; and it is evident you do know something of her history."

"I do not know what to say," came the declaration.

"You had better confide fully in me."

"I am not at liberty to do so."

"Is Miss Page on good terms with her guardian?"

"You know of him?"

"Yes; I have been in communication with that scoundrel."

"And you are not seeking Ethel in his interest?"

"I am not."

"You are really her friend?"

"I am the friend of Wilbur Beach."

"I will tell you all I know," said the lady.

Henry Brand had reached the conclusion that the young lady to whom he was talking was a very sincere and honest girl.

"It is better that you should tell me all, and if you are a friend of Miss Page you will not regret your confidence."

There was a magnetism about Henry Brand. He had a way and method peculiar to himself for winning the confidence of others.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"My name is Emily Smith."

"You reside at —?"

The detective located the house from which he had seen the lady come forth. She betrayed surprise, and he said:

"It is only fair to say that I trailed Miss Page to that house, and I followed you when you went to the loan-office."

"I trust no one else has trailed her to that house."

"I think it is all right. But proceed and tell me your story, and if Miss Page is missing, I think I will know where to look for her. But there are facts I desire to know before I meet her."

"Miss Page and I were school-mates here in Brooklyn. I was her friend and confidante in school. I lost sight of her for a number of years, until about two weeks ago, when she came to my house, and then she told me her story. She was a fugitive. She told me that she was under the care of a guardian, a man whom she hated and despised.

"She said that this guardian was seeking to force her to become his wife. She also said that she had loved a young man whom she had met in Europe named Wilbur Beach. She also informed me that the man she loved was dead. My mother for the last few years has been compelled to keep boarders."

"Miss Page had no money, and she desired to pay her board, and to-day she insisted that I should secure a loan on a diamond ring she had in her possession. I tried to persuade her not to part with her ring, but she insisted.

"As it was not considered safe for her to go upon the street, I proceeded to the loan-office. You know what followed. I returned to my home only to learn that Ethel had gone out, saying she would return in a few moments. She did not return, and up to the time I left the house to meet you, she had been away at least four hours. Now, sir," added Miss Smith, "I have told you all I know."

"I am very glad you have confided in me; and you have been so ingenuous and frank, I will be equally open with you."

The detective proceeded and related all the incidents that are well known to our readers.

When he had concluded, Miss Smith remarked:

"This man Leighton appears to be a villain."

"He is undoubtedly a villain. He is determined to force Ethel to become his wife if he can."

"She is of legal age now, and can compel him to make an accounting; but for some reason she refuses to do so."

"Has she been advised to do so?"

"Yes. I so advised her."

"And what reason did she give for not accepting your advice?"

"She gave no reason, and said she must wait."

"Miss Smith, you must not reveal to any one the facts I have told to you."

"I will not."

"Do not even make a confidant of your mother."

"I have not done so."

"Then your mother does not know the history of her young boarder?"

"No; I concocted a story partly true and partly fabricated. We have not taken any one into our confidence."

"It is well; and now the question arises: what has become of Ethel?"

"I have grave fears. A strange man has been spying around our house."

"Are you aware that Ethel sent a note to her guardian?"

"No."

"It is true she sent a note to him by a boy. It is possible, as he failed to deliver her note, that she has gone in person to meet him."

The lady thought a moment, and then said:

"It is possible she may have hoped to obtain money from him. She felt very much troubled about money."

"I will ask you to meet me to-night near your house."

"I will meet you."

"Meet me at ten o'clock; I will detain you but a moment."

CHAPTER XXVI.

HENRY BRAND escorted Miss Smith to the vicinity of her home and left her. He proceeded to New York to keep an appointment with Strouse. He met his man at a down-town resort, and after the usual greetings, asked:

"Well, what have you accomplished?"

"Nothing. I have not been able to get on the man's track at all."

"I have done better. I came within an ace of capturing Miss Page."

The detective related what had occurred.

"It is very unfortunate you did not get there in time to catch her."

"It is; but one fact is established: she did run away from that man. She is not his wife, and up to a certain hour to-day no harm had come to her."

"It is possible she may be in that man's power now."

"We will know pretty soon."

The detective proceeded to his lodgings and met young Sheppard. The young man had nothing to report. He had seen nothing of Leighton, and was satisfied the man had not returned to his home.

At ten o'clock the man appeared again in Brooklyn. Miss Smith met him, and stated that Ethel had not returned.

* * * * *

Two days passed, and during those two days the detective was very busy. He made several visits to Brooklyn, and resorted to many cunning schemes; but every time, after running them to an end, encountered disappointment.

The man Leighton had disappeared. He could not get on to the fellow's track. He had not been to the little frame house since the night an attempt had been made to abduct Strouse.

On the third day the detective determined to work a new scheme. He started to find some one who had been acquainted with Mr. Page, the father of Ethel.

He succeeded after a long search, and in the end heard of the lawyer who had done business for Mr. Page. He visited the lawyer, and learned many very important facts.

Then he started upon a new scent. He visited several asylums, both public and private, thinking it possible that Wilbur Beach might have been confined in one of them.

His search, however, proved fruitless, and upon the fourth day he held a long talk with Jack Sheppard.

The lad had kept a constant watch upon the little frame house, and reported that he had seen no sign of Leighton.

Then Strouse, Jack, and the detective started on a tramp. From morning until night they all three of them tramped and tramped, so that nearly all the thoroughfares of the city were gone over again and again.

It seemed a hopeless task; but Henry was persistent, and kept up the tramping until midnight.

At length he determined to retire to his lodgings, and as he approached his home he made a discovery. He saw that a man was dodging around the vicinity, and he muttered in a cheerful tone:

"At last! at last!"

The detective did not go to his home. He had parted with Strouse but few moments previously, and he ran back and overtook his comrade.

The two men held a few moments' conversation, and then the detective proceeded direct to his home, and entered it.

A few moments later there came a ring at his door-bell. The detective went to the door, and upon opening it was greeted with the announcement:

"I have come, sir, to make a report."

"Ah, Thompson, you have come at last!"

"Yes, sir, I am here."

"Why did you hang around? Why did you not come openly to see me?"

"I merely awaited your return."

The two men proceeded to our hero's sitting-room, and after lighting cigars, the detective asked:

"Well, what have you to report?"

"I made up my mind after I parted from you that it would be better for me to enter your service. I am a man of the world. I have had a great deal of experience, and I know that in the end, detectives, when in the right, always win."

"You came to a very sensible conclusion."

"When I left you, I went back to the house where you had made me prisoner. I expected to find Mr. Leighton there, but he had gone, and there was not a soul around. I visited the house on the following day several times, but no one showed up. I then visited other places where I had been in the habit of meeting Mr. Leighton, but I failed to discover him. I then determined to start out on a little detective business myself, and I did, and the result is that I have discovered that the jig, as far as I am concerned, is all up."

"How so?"

"I had expected to make a little money out of the job, but I never will, for Leighton has skipped."

"When did he go?"

"The day following the adventure at the place over on Long Island."

"He skipped the day following?"

"Yes; but I know where he went, if that will be of any service to you."

"Where did he go?"

"He has gone to the City of Mexico, and taken the girl with him."

"You are sure about this?"

"Yes."

"Then he had the girl in his possession all the time?"

"Yes."

"And you knew just where he had her a prisoner?"

"No, I did not know exactly; but I did know that she was under his care."

There came a peculiar gleam in the detective's eyes as he asked:

"And why didn't you tell me about this before?"

"I was waiting to procure accurate and positive information for you."

"And you are sure this man has fled to Mexico?"

"Yes."

"Then you can be of no service to me."

"No; but I thought it the right thing to come and report to you the facts as I have obtained them."

"You are very kind."

"I will give you a pointer. I do not believe he has really gone to the City of Mexico."

"What do you suspect?"

"I will bet a hundred he is at this moment in St. Louis, and I can name the house where he is staying, and if you are up and off quickly you can catch him, and the girl is with him."

"No; I will not pursue him. If he has gone away, that ends the matter as far as I am concerned."

"I will go with you."

It is unnecessary to state that Henry saw through the trick.

The detective happened to know that upon the day indicated the girl Ethel was not under the care of Leighton, and he did not propose to run off on a wild-goose chase. He saw, also, that for some reason Thompson had determined to remain faithful to Leighton.

"Will you follow him up?" asked Thompson.

"No; I think not."

"I will go with you, as I said; and as an earnest of my sincerity, I will pay my own expenses until I do a service that will entitle me to recognition on your part."

"I will think the matter over, Thompson."

"I would like to have the fellow run down."

"Why?"

"He has gone back on me."

"How?"

"He skipped without settling up with me. That man owes me a large sum of money."

"Why don't you follow him on your own account?"

"I will. But I have no interest in the girl. I thought it might be a good chance for you to run him down."

"I will think it over, old man."

"He is a precious scamp; and I will say that I believe he has forced the girl to marry him."

"If she is his wife, there is no object in my following him; and between you and me, Thompson, there is no profit in the affair—for me, anyhow; but you can call here in a few days, and I will let you know my decision."

Thompson appeared dissatisfied and uneasy. He did not show a disposition to depart, and the detective said:

"Have you anything more to communicate?"

"I am disappointed. I thought you would follow him right up."

"I may conclude to do so; but you can come and see me again."

Thompson at length took his departure, and the detective sat with an amused smile upon his face; and he muttered:

"A pretty cute game—yes, a very cute game; but I've got him now, and don't let it be forgotten."

Thompson left the detective's house, and walked away very slowly; and as he went, he muttered:

"The scheme won't work. That man is as cute as the devil. He doesn't take to the lead-off at all."

The man, as has been stated, walked very slowly, and when at the corner of the street he came to a halt. A moment he stood, and then passed forward. When several squares away, he again came to a halt, and after a few moments he was joined by another man.

"Well, Tommy, what did you make out?" asked Thompson.

"It's all right."

"He didn't follow?"

"No one came from his house."

"Good enough! I will meet you to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THOMPSON proceeded along across town, and finally arrived in front of an old-fashioned brick house. Here he lingered a moment, and then entered the house with a night-key. It was between twelve and one o'clock. He went to the rear parlor, and there sat the man whom he had stated, a half hour previously, had gone to Mexico.

"Did you see him?" asked Leighton.

"I did."

"And how did he take your communication?"

"He didn't take it at all."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"I fear you did not manage it well."

"I managed it as well as any one could; but the fact is, that man is mighty smart, and we will have to get up very early in the morning when we fool him."

"Then it's your opinion that he did not believe your statement?"

"That is my opinion—yes, sir."

Leighton was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"I have tried every reasonable method for getting that man out of the way."

"There is but one way for you to succeed, in my opinion—kill him!"

"No; I have a more certain method, and one attended with less risk. But it's strange how he chanced to get involved in this affair at all."

"You say you have a way of settling the affair?"

"Yes."

"You had better carry out your plan at once. You never know what move that man may be making. One thing is certain: he is on to something, or he would not be so independent. He has certain information, you can wager all you're worth."

"What makes you think so?"

"The way he talked to me. He did not need my help. He did not want any information from me, and it's my idea that he is ready to close in on you."

"If that is true, I know what to do," was the answer.

"I know what I would do," said Thompson.

"And what would you do?"

"I would take the girl and flee away. These men are on your track, and sooner or later they will run you down, and the proof exists in the fact that this detective did not arrest you for the abduction of Strouse. When he let you go free he had an object. I tell you, these fellows are very deep and cunning, and you never know just when they are going to hop over on to you. Take my advice: smuggle the girl out of New York. Disappear."

"It could carry out one scheme, flight would be unnecessary."

"You mean if you could induce the girl to marry you?"

"Yes."

"Force her to do so."

"Ah! there comes the difficulty."

"How?"

"I can not explain to you; but there are reasons why I can not force her to marry me."

"Then do the next best thing: take her away from New York. Unless you do you are a loser."

"I will consider your proposition."

Leighton left the room and ascended to the floor above and listened at the rear room door. He heard some one moving within the room, and he knocked at the door, and after a moment he knocked again, when the query came

"Who is there?"

"Have you retired, Ethel?"

It was some time before there came an answer to the question, and then it came in the form of a counter question.

"Do you wish to speak with me?"

"I do."

The key was turned in the door, and a beautiful girl stood at the threshold.

The man entered the room, and the girl took a seat, and motioned to Leighton to do likewise.

She was indeed a beautiful girl. Her face wore a care-worn look; but withal she was, as stated, very beautiful to gaze upon.

"You will excuse me, Ethel, for disturbing you at such an hour."

"I will excuse you, certainly."

"I have a proposition to make."

The girl did not speak, and Leighton proceeded.

"I have received a letter from a friend in Paris."

"Well?"

"My friend has been in communication with your relative, Mr. Strouse."

"Where is my relative?"

"He is in England, and I propose that we go to England. I am a sad and disappointed man. I told you I would not annoy you further, and I propose to keep my word."

"Why should we go to England?"

"It is my desire to surrender you to the care of your relative, and then I shall—"

The man did not proceed, but appeared to be struggling with a great emotion.

"What will you do, Mr. Leighton?"

"We will not speak of that now. Ah, Ethel, Ethel, how I have loved you! Why I am not a madman I do not know, lest it be that hoping against hope I have felt the day would come when you would relent."

"Relent?" repeated Ethel. "Can I forget your treatment of me?"

"Listen, my dear child. I have treated you kindly."

"In one way—yes; but have you not deprived me of my liberty?"

"No; I have only exercised a little restraint, and you know I have acted reluctantly, in accordance with the wishes of your late father. I showed you his letter of instructions to me, written just previous to his death. Ethel, you wrong me. Did I but consider myself, I would act differently. I would have acted differently, but I was merely obeying the instructions of a dying father—a man who loved me as though I were his own son—a man who put such confidence in me that he consigned to me his child. In being faithful to your father I have forfeited your respect; ay, more, I sacrificed your love."

"You deceived yourself, Mr. Leighton. I never could have loved you. Love does not come at command. It is a sentiment that springs up spontaneously in our hearts. No, no; I never would have loved you."

"Admitting that to be true, I was compelled to throw every obstacle in the way of your intimacy with that man Wilbur Beach."

"Why?"

"Ethel, I will now tell you something that I never told you before, and you can believe me; for now he is dead, I can have no object in deceiving you. Since my return to America I have made a startling discovery; You were being deceived. That man Beach already had a wife."

The beautiful girl started back, and over her face there came a look of anguish, and in a faltering voice she asked:

"Is this true?"

"Ethel, I would not slander the dead, and you know I never lied to you. Yes, he did have a wife. His wife still lives. I told you before that he was an unworthy man; I told you he sought your fortune; I told you he knew all about you when he met you first, and pretended that it was a chance meeting. Every movement of that man was made on the basis of a deep design. It was regard for your feelings that persuaded me to withhold these facts until now."

"Can you prove your statements?" asked Ethel.

"I can," came the answer.

Leighton was playing his last card, as far as one line of action was concerned. As he had stated, there were reasons why he had not resorted to force to compel Ethel to become his wife and be stow upon him her great fortune.

"Will you give me the proof?" said Ethel.

"I will; but first I wish you to fully understand the situation."

"If you knew Wilbur Beach was a married man, why did you not tell me?"

"I did not know until our return to America, and at the time I discovered the fact he was a dying man, the victim of his own excesses. I determined to wait until my statements would be robed of all suspicion of slander. I have told you he was a man of bad habits."

Ethel was silent, but her face expressed the depth of her anguish.

"You would not believe what I told you?"

"No."

"You suspected my motives, and yet the day will come when my conduct will stand in its true light and I will be vindicated. It may not be until after I am dead, but when the vindication comes, you will realize how kind and true a friend I have been to you."

There came a softer light in Ethel's eyes. Leighton saw his advantage, and continued:

"My love, Ethel, has been unselfish, and I do ask that you permit me to present my case."

"Proceed."

"You were consigned to my care. I assumed the duties of guardian with a great deal of reluctance. I did not feel myself equal to the task of becoming the guide and protector of a young lady. You will testify to my assiduous attention to your comfort."

"It may appear that I have wronged you, Mr. Leighton."

"Yes, you have wronged me. I will not say intentionally, but you have misconstrued my intentions and misunderstood my motives. I am a young man, you are beautiful and lovable. You have said within a half hour that love rises spontaneously within our hearts, that we can not direct or control the sentiment, and what you said is true. I could not help falling in love with

you. It is not my fault that I love you to madness; but since loving you I have considered your happiness, your happiness alone, and the commands put upon me by your dead father.

"You met this young man Beach. At the time I considered the meeting accidental. I was disappointed; but I determined to look into his character, and if I found him worthy, I determined to bury my own hopes forever, and consider your happiness alone.

"I made inquiries, and they were not at all satisfactory. I pursued my investigations, and established the fact that he was an unworthy man.

"At that point I committed my first mistake; but it was tender consideration for you that led me to do so."

"How?"

"I knew that you had met him but a few times. I did not think your affection for him could be very deep upon so slight an acquaintance; and instead of wounding your feelings by telling you how unworthy he was, I adopted other methods for turning you away from him, and there I made a mistake. I should have furnished you the proofs of his unworthiness at once, while they were at hand, and I believe now that, had I done so, all would have been well."

"If he was an unworthy man, and you could prove it, you should have done so."

"I admit my error; but all is well that ends well. Death has stepped in and saved you."

The look of anguish deepened upon the girl's face.

"Yes, had he lived, I never would have had the courage to expose to you all his infamy."

"You say he was a married man, and you can prove it?"

"I can."

"And you will?"

"I will."

"And you love me?"

"I do love you as intensely as man ever loved woman."

"I can not say that I love you. I can not promise that I ever can love you, but if you will prove that Wilbur Beach has a wife while seeking my love, I will become your wife, provided you are willing to make me such after the statements I have just made."

"I can prove it, Ethel," exclaimed Leighton in a triumphant tone.

"Do so, and I will keep my word, and I will banish that man's remembrance from my memory forever. I loved that man. My love may have been a madness. I could not help it."

"You speak for me now, Ethel."

"But even loving him as I did, let it be proved that he was unworthy, that he was basely deceiving me, and I will tear his image from my heart."

The man sat a moment seemingly reluctant to proceed, but at length he drew a photograph from his pocket, and said:

"Ethel, see this."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE man handed Ethel a photograph. The fair girl glanced at it and her features became transfixed. Long she gazed, and there came over her face a change. Her eyes blazed with a strange light. The look of horror and amazement was supplemented by an expression of anger.

Leighton watched her as the first look came, and he smiled triumphantly upon beholding the glance that followed.

"Who is this woman?" demanded the girl.

"It is a portrait of Wilbur Beach and his wife."

"Where did you get this?"

"From him; I was with him when he died. I was good to him although I knew he did you a great wrong. He tried to make me promise that you should never see this. He sought to persuade me to promise to refrain from ever exposing to you his true character; but I explained to him that it was necessary for your future happiness that you should know all, and at length he consented to a revelation of his meanness, but demanded that I should wait at least till one month after his death."

"And this woman—his wife?"

"Oh, I have provided for her."

"She lives?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Here in New York."

"Does she know of me?"

"Yes; I told her all."

"How could you be so cruel?"

"It was not cruel."

"Yes, it was very cruel."

"No; she did not love the man; she despised him, and it was really a kindness to tell her the truth."

"Can I see this woman?"

"You can."

"I do not wish her to know that I am the woman he deceived."

"No; I did not reveal to her your identity."

"You did well. When can I see her?"

"To-morrow, if you desire it."

"Very well; to-morrow I will see her. And now please leave me to myself."

"Ethel, you forgive me?"

"Certainly I do."

The man advanced, and added:

"Give me your hand. Let me impress one little kiss upon it, as a seal of your promise and my happiness."

The girl extended her hand, but at that instant there came a loud rap at the door.

The girl withdrew her hand, and Leighton drew back, and his face became deathly pale. He stepped to the door and looked out.

No one was at the door. He stepped again into the room, and in a low tone said:

"There is no one there; what could it mean?"

Ethel stood pale and trembling. There evidently came over her a feeling of superstitious awe, as in a husky voice she demanded:

"Some one must have been there. Who could it have been?"

Leighton shoved the door toward the silt, and said:

"It is nothing. Come, give me your hand."

"Oh, I fear!"

"You fear what?"

"I can not tell. It was so strange."

"It was an accident, Ethel. Come; we will be happy, and forget the incident. Let me seal your pledge upon your hand."

The girl extended her hand, and the man leaned forward to kiss it, when a second time there came a clear and distinct rap upon the door.

The girl screamed as she drew back, and Leighton stood aghast.

"Go, go!" cried the girl; and there was a strange, wild look in her eyes.

Leighton stepped out to the hall. He looked around in every direction. Not a living soul was in sight. He had not heard any one go away.

He started to return to the room, but Ethel stood looking like a ghost, so pale was she, and she waved him back.

"It's nothing," said Leighton. "Some one is perpetrating a foolish joke. It is my friend."

"No, no; it is a protest from the dead," said Ethel, in a husky voice.

"Nonsense! And if it were, Ethel, it is the protest of a devil. Listen: when you have seen and talked with the widow of that man, you will not heed aught from him, even though it may come from the grave. But, my child, there is no such thing as a protest from the dead. It is a cruel joke, and its author shall confess it."

Leighton descended the stairs. The man was perplexed, but he knew it could not be as Ethel believed.

The girl, meantime, paced the room, and at length she muttered:

"What can it mean? what can it mean?"

And there came a voice, saying:

"It means that Leighton is a liar!"

A moment passed, and in a trembling voice she demanded:

"Who spoke?"

"I spoke," came the answer; and Henry Brand stood in the presence of the amazed girl.

The detective had spoken in a low tone. He held up his hand warningly, and Ethel, though terribly frightened, took in the situation. It was not a ghost, but a rather fine-looking man. Henry did not leave the girl long in doubt. He said:

"Leighton is a villain! You must not believe one word that he says to you. Wilbur Beach is an honorable man."

"Who are you?" demanded the girl.

Both spoke in low tones and very rapidly.

"I am a friend of Wilbur Beach and Mr. Strouse," came the answer.

"You are the friend of Wilbur Beach?"

"I am."

"His friend?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"But Wilbur Beach is dead?"

"That is Leighton's falsehood. He is not dead."

"Sir, how can I believe you when I tell you I gazed upon his dead face?"

"That can be explained."

"And you tell me he is not dead?"

"He is not dead."

"Ah, sir, please explain. Why are you here? Why do you say Wilbur Beach is not dead?"

"I am here because I am the friend of Wilbur Beach, and later on I will explain what must now appear so strange to you; but, mark me, Leighton will return here in a moment. You must pretend to believe all he tells you. I will hide here in your room. At the proper moment I will confront the man, and prove him a liar to his teeth. Hark! he comes! Remember, do not let him know you have seen any one. All will come out well; but let him still believe you know nothing."

The detective took up his position in a closet, and a moment later Leighton re-entered the room. His face was pale, but he came prepared with an explanation.

Before proceeding with the direct narrative, we will explain how it happened that Henry Brand was at hand in the room to confront Ethel Page.

CHAPTER XXIX.

As our readers will remember, when the detective returned to his home and discovered a man loitering around, he ran back and called Strouse. To his friend he gave certain directions. He then returned to his lodgings and held the interview with Thompson, the details of which have been recorded.

Having arranged his plans, and knowing that Thompson was a shrewd fellow, the detective did not follow him, and it was some time before he did issue forth to the street.

When he did, he went to the corner. He looked down, and saw an arrow chalked on the sidewalk, and the point of the arrow was a guide as to the direction he was to take.

He followed on, and came across several arrows, and finally he came to a point where there was a different mark. He waited a few minutes, and Strouse appeared.

Our hero had instructed Strouse to watch the man Thompson, and shadow him, and Strouse had performed his part well. He

had marked the arrow, so that Henry could follow him, and he had shadowed Thompson to his home. He then returned and met our hero, and, upon approaching, he said:

"It's all right."
"You have treed him?"
"I have."
"He has no suspicion?"
"No."

The two men walked down the street, and Strouse pointed out the house he had seen Thompson enter. Henry took the bearings, and discovered that he could gain an entrance into the house through the kitchen window.

He was prepared to take all chances, and did enter, and was a listener to the talk between Thompson and Leighton. He then stole up the stairs after Leighton, and was a listener to every word that passed between Leighton and his ward.

He was the party who at the critical moment rapped on the door, and he found a hiding-place in the closet leading up to the room through the scuttle-way. He was taking great chances, but did not really care much whether he were discovered or not.

As it chanced, Leighton was too greatly confused to think of making a search, and when he left the room and the presence of Ethel, he went down-stairs to consult Thompson, but he discovered that the man had gone out, and muttered:

"It's strange, but I think I see through it all now. Thompson is a tricky fellow, and for some reason he has played this trick on me. Well, well! in good time I can punish him."

The man returned upstairs, and, as has been stated, re-entered the presence of Ethel. The girl was quite bright, and she was also prepared to meet the man. She did not know what explanations were to come, but she had heard enough to believe that the man who had appeared so strangely in her room was indeed a friend.

He had not only mentioned the name of Wilbur Beach but the name of Strouse, and the latter was her relative, and she decided that it was he who was at the bottom of the whole affair as it was developing.

Upon re-entering the room, Leighton was pale, and appeared very much excited, as it has been stated, and he said:

"It's all explained, Ethel."

"How?"

"Mr. Thompson wished to inform me that a friend desired to see me at once."

The girl knew the man told a falsehood.

There followed a moment's silence. Leighton was very uneasy, and, in fact, completely upset. He could not explain the mysterious raps. He did not believe Thompson was the author of them.

"If your friend wished to see you, why did he not wait until you came to him?"

"Oh, he knew I would understand the signal, and go down-stairs. And now, Ethel, remember your promise to me."

"You must remember your promise to me. You are to prove that Wilbur Beach was a villain."

"I can easily do that; but you already have the proof in your hands."

"I can not consider this as absolute proof. The girl represented here in the picture may be a relative."

The man assumed a look of injured innocence, and said:

"Can you doubt me? Do you believe that I am a villain?"

"Ah! strange suspicions have run through my mind."

"What do you mean?"

"I hardly dare tell you. That strange, mysterious knock; it must be explained."

"It can, and shall be explained."

"But it has caused strange suspicions, as I said, to run through my mind."

"Nonsense!"

"I have come to think that it is possible that Wilbur Beach still lives."

Leighton gave a start, as though he had been shot.

"It is your turn to explain now," he said.

"I have no explanation to make. I have but told you of a suspicion."

"You know Wilbur Beach is dead. Did you not gaze upon his dead face?"

"Yes, I was made to believe that I did."

"Ethel, Ethel, what strange words are those you are uttering? Do you believe I am a villain?"

"If it should be proved that Wilbur Beach is not dead, I shall certainly be compelled to believe that you are a bad man."

Leighton gazed in the uttermost amazement, and finally he said: "I see it all now. While you were away you were in communication with some evil person. How foolish you were to go away from me."

"George Leighton, answer me: is Wilbur Beach dead or living?"

"What do you mean by such a question?"

"Why do you not answer it?"

"Why should I answer it?"

"There is good reason why you should answer it."

Ethel's whole manner and tone had suddenly changed.

"What is the good reason?"

"It is a test question. It will test your honor."

"How?"

"It will prove or disprove the honesty of your statements."

"Ethel, you must make me understand what all this means."

"I have asked you a simple question. Is Wilbur Beach living or dead?"

"Did you not gaze on his dead face?"

"I am not certain."

"What has come over you?"

"I may have dreamed that I gazed on his dead face."

"It was no dream. Was I not with you? Did I not stand with you beside his coffin?"

"Yes; but I doubt the fact of his death."

"Girl, you have gone mad!"

"Your strange actions confirm my suspicions."

"You have surely gone mad."

"No, I am not mad; and I will prove it. Wilbur Beach still lives. Why did you seek to convince me that he was dead?"

"Ethel, who told you this nonsense?"

"You dare not deny it."

"The statement is preposterous."

"And you dare tell me that Wilbur Beach is dead?"

"Yes, he is dead; and you know it. You gazed on his dead face."

"Mr. Leighton, you had better confess all to me."

"Mad girl, who has put these wild ideas in your head?"

"They came with that mysterious knock."

"Aha!" cried Leighton, as his face assumed a deathly hue; "some one has intruded in this house."

"A ghost has walked here."

"What nonsense! Come, come, Ethel, tell me what all this means!"

"It means that I have been told that Wilbur Beach lives."

"And who told you?"

"I did," said Henry Brand, as he stepped from his place of concealment in the closet.

CHAPTER XXX.

HAD a veritable ghost stepped from the closet and confronted the man Leighton, the ghostly presence would not have created the consternation that followed the appearance of our hero.

The man Leighton stood and gazed aghast, and for a moment a most strange, startling, and extraordinary tableau was presented.

"You here?" at length ejaculated Leighton.

"Yes, I am here."

"You miserable scoundrel! How dare you enter this house?"

"Did I not tell you I was watching you? And now I have run you down. I've listened to the falsehoods you have uttered here, and will now afford you an opportunity to tell the truth."

The man made a motion as though to draw a weapon; but the detective said:

"Hold on! Do not attempt anything so foolish. Come; introduce me to your wife."

"I will settle with you some day."

"Yes; you will settle with me now. That is what I am here for."

The man started to leave the room, but Henry commanded:

"Wait, my friend. You are my prisoner!"

Leighton turned; his eyes shone with preternatural brilliancy as he said:

"Bah! I've enjoyed your jokes before."

"It's no joke this time."

"Mister, I've but one word to say to you, and that is: You have gone too far; you have had your innings. It is mine now. I shall appear at police headquarters, and prefer charges against you."

"That's all right. You will get a patient audience, as I have been in consultation at headquarters all the time I have been on your track. But when you go to headquarters, you will go in my company."

Ethel had stood in silent amazement during the extraordinary scene we have described.

Henry Brand caused her still greater surprise when he suddenly leaped forward and seized hold of Leighton, and in the space of a second, as it were, clapped the handcuffs on him.

"You need not be surprised, Miss Page," said Henry; "but I have this man's record. He is a criminal, and you, of all persons in the world, have least cause to pity him."

"The wrongs he has done you are many. He is a mean scamp, and I have no doubt we will prove him not only a kidnapper, but a thief. He has deceived you from the first.

"He has held control of your fortune; how much of it he has squandered we are yet to learn; but I tell you now, in his presence, that he knows he is a villain, and he knows that Wilbur Beach is an honorable young man."

"The seeming mystery of the death of young Beach I can explain, and that fellow knows I can explain it, and I will tell you more—he led young Beach to believe that you were dead."

"Indeed, he has been a deceiver and conspirator from away back, as we officers say, and I am glad to be down on him at last, and down on him I am at this moment like a thousand of brick. But, miss, I've much to say to you."

"I do not propose to make revelations in this man's presence. I will remove him, and then unfold to you a tale that will cause you to start in amazement at every word."

Leighton was completely broken up, and he exclaimed:

"In mercy, let me speak one word!"

"Speak," said the detective.

"I wish to be alone with Ethel a few moments."

"Do you wish to be alone with this man, Miss Page?"

Ethel did not at once reply.

"Ah, Ethel, do not refuse to let me speak to you alone."

"I can not see what you can have to say," declared Ethel.

"I have much to say."

"Do you admit the charges that have been made against you?"

"I will speak to you. I have much to say."

"What would you advise me to do?" demanded the girl, addressing the detective.

"He can talk to you after you and I have exchanged explanations."

"Let me speak with you first, Ethel."

"I can not."
"You can. This man has left it to you."
"I will speak with you afterward."
"And you refuse?"
"I must."
"Let me say one word in his presence."
"Speak," said Henry.

"Ethel, no matter what may be proved against me, remember one fact: All I did was prompted by my mad love for you. Yes, I did love you; I love you now. I have treated you kindly, but I have sought to win your love. I may have resorted to deception, but it was because I was madly in love. Let this be my excuse, no matter what the developments may be."

There came a kindly look in Ethel's eyes—what woman could resent so affecting an appeal?—and she said:

"I will remember what you say."

Henry led the man into an adjoining room, and said:

"I feel sorry for you, Leighton."

"Ah! I am not as bad a man as you think. What I said to Ethel is the truth."

"You can never win her love. You have done her a great wrong."

"I have—I have."

"Are you ready to make atonement?"

"I am—I am."

"If you do, it will be much better for you."

"Oh, I wish that man were dead!"

"Wilbur Beach?"

"Yes. Had he not crossed my path, I would be a happy man at this moment."

"Where is young Beach?"

"How should I know?"

"Do you dare tell me that you do not know where he is?"

The man made no answer.

"Leighton, if you wish to escape the penalty of your crimes, you will confess all."

"I know nothing about that man."

"You know that he is alive."

"I suppose he is."

"And you know where he is."

"I do not. I swear I do not."

"I thought you desired to make me your friend?"

"I do not know where that man is. I swear it."

"You inveigled him away. I have the proofs."

"It is true."

"Then you know where he is?"

"I do not."

"You are responsible for his absence?"

"I am."

"And still you deny that you know where he is?"

"I do."

"You hope to have Ethel forgive you?"

"I do—I do."

"If she is to forgive you, my man, you must make all the atonement you can."

"I have no doubt the young man can be found."

"Can you aid us to find him?"

"I can."

"Will you?"

"I will."

"Enough. And now listen to me. I am really sorry for you; but it will all come out right in the end, save that you must make up your mind to banish the image of Ethel from your heart forever."

"Yes, I will do that and die!" came the desperate suggestion.

"That is your own affair," said the detective.

"Yes, I will die."

"Then if you have made up your mind to die, you will make a clean confession. You certainly will not die with any concealments on your soul."

"I have confessed all."

"We will talk about that later on. You will remain here. I desire to have a few minutes' talk with Miss Page. If you attempt to escape, you may die sooner than you expect."

The detective secured the man, and retired to the presence of Ethel.

Henry found the young girl pacing the room, and she said:

"Who are you, sir?"

The detective smiled, and said:

"I have a long story to tell you, miss;" and he proceeded and related to Ethel all the facts known to our readers. Ethel listened with deep attention, and when the narrative was concluded, she said:

"How strange is the story you have told me!"

"I have told you the truth. And now, miss, I am prepared to listen to your statements."

The young lady told the detective that she knew nothing about the terms of her father's will. She was at school when her father died, and George Leighton came to her with a letter from her father, written just before his death, wherein she was informed that Leighton was her legally appointed guardian.

She stated further that Leighton had treated her as a ward in every sense up to the time of her meeting with Wilbur Beach, and then the man had confessed his love for her, and he had sought to impress her with the idea that it was her father's dying wish that she should become his wife.

She knew nothing about the duel in France. She only knew that she was temporarily confined, and all the time Leighton protested that he was acting as her father would have desired.

The man brought her to America after her confession that she

loved Wilbur Beach, and would marry him or remain single all her life.

He then sought to vilify Wilbur's character, and seeing his efforts failed in that direction, he placed her in a boarding-house in New York, and took up his abode elsewhere.

And he one day, after many months, told her that he had found Wilbur, and that he was dying; and one night he took her to a house where he said Wilbur had died, and he showed her his dead body in a coffin.

"How long were you in that house?"

"For one night only."

"Why did you go there secretly?"

"He told me Wilbur was a fugitive. He pretended I should see him before he died, and later, when he took me to the house, informed me at the last moment that he was dead, and he had feared to tell me."

"And you were in that house one night only?"

"I was there upon two occasions."

The detective meditated a moment, and said:

"Then it was upon those occasions that the young man saw you to whom you are indebted for my interest in your behalf?"

"Yes; that must be true."

The detective spoke about her living in Brooklyn, and she said:

"Yes; I did determine to flee from Leighton, and I went to Brooklyn, and made my home with an old schoolmate."

"And why did you return to that man's custody?"

"I had no money. I sent a note to him which was not delivered, and I determined to see him personally. I knew I was of age, and that he had no legal control over me."

"He had always treated you well?"

"Yes."

"He never offered you any violence?"

"No."

"Proceed."

"I met him, and he brought me to this house, and the rest you know. He attempted to prove to me that Wilbur had been a dishonorable man. He intended to prove that he had a wife living."

"And it is all false."

"I am satisfied now; but how did he mean to prove it?"

"Let me see that photograph."

CHAPTER XXXI.

The girl showed Henry the picture, and the detective, after looking at it closely, said:

"It was a cunning scheme. The man was full of devices."

"Who is the lady?"

"I do not know."

"What do you mean when you say it was a cunning scheme?"

"That photograph is a copy."

"I do not understand."

"It is a manufactured picture. He must have secured a photograph of young Beach, and used a photograph of the woman, and had the two pictures copied on to one plate. He probably has secured the woman to act a part. He would have brought her into your presence, and she would have told you a pack of lies. I will so make him confess."

"And where is Wilbur Beach?"

"I believe that man knows, and I will compel him to tell."

"You are satisfied that Wilbur is alive?"

"I am."

"And all the stories about his being a dishonorable man are false?"

"I will stake my reputation on his honor."

"What will you do with that man?"

"That matter we must decide. But you must now place yourself under my protection until all the mysteries are unraveled."

"I can return to my friend in Brooklyn."

"Yes; that will do."

"Where is Mr. Strouse?"

"You shall see him to-morrow."

The detective and Ethel talked over matters until broad daylight, and then Henry summoned Strouse, who was in the house.

He placed Ethel under his care, and directed him to conduct her to Brooklyn; and at a proper hour Ethel started with her relative for the home of her friend Miss Smith.

After the departure of Strouse and Ethel, the detective again entered the presence of George Leighton, and said:

"Now, sir, you and I must come to terms, or you must go to jail."

"Where is Ethel?"

"She is safe."

"You have taken her away?"

"No; she has gone away. She is of age," was the answer.

"I must see her."

"You can not see her until—"

"When?"

"Until Wilbur Beach is found."

"I will aid you to find Beach. I am done scheming."

"That is all right. I will be satisfied when young Beach is found. And now, one more question: How about the will?"

"Under the will, Ethel comes into full possession of her estate. I receive a sum that will take care of me. It was not her money I sought. I am rich in my own right. I loved her madly."

"Will you give me some information that will lead toward the finding of young Beach?"

"I will," assented the man.

"Tell me all," said Henry.

"There is a man I must see."

"What man?"

"The man who abducted him. Wilbur Beach may be dead. If he is, I am not responsible for his death."

"Ah! you are not?"

"No."

"You will be held responsible for his death, and I will furnish the most indisputable proofs of your guilt."

"I do not believe he is dead."

"If he is, you will hang, if not as the actual murderer, as the accessory. Yes, it is better for you that he is living. When can we see the man?"

"Let me go, and I will find him."

"That will not do. You shall not leave my sight until he is found and under my protection."

The man was thoughtful for a few moments, and then said:

"I think I know where he is."

There came a smile to Henry's face, and he said:

"Yes; I think you do."

"Take me to breakfast, and we will proceed to the place. But where is Thompson?"

"Oh, he is all right."

"That man betrayed me."

"He did not."

Thompson had learned what he had been following.

He knew the house had been surrounded, and he had sloped; that was the matter with Thompson.

Henry removed the handcuffs from Leighton, and the two men left the house together.

A few squares distant, and they were met by Thompson.

The men exchanged a few words, and the situation was opened up to Leighton's confederate, and he said:

"You know where the young man is. I advise you to make terms."

The detective and Leighton had their breakfast, and then proceeded to a well-known town on the shore of Long Island Sound.

In two hours they reached the place, and on the way Leighton had revealed that he believed Wilbur Beach was an inmate of an insane asylum.

"I reckon you know," was Henry's laconic reply; and he added: "You have done well, old man, under all the circumstances."

They reached the asylum, and a few minutes later, after some explanations between the doctor in charge and his visitors, Henry was led to a ward, and to the keeper he said:

"You can unlock the door and go."

The man had received his instructions before conducting the detective, and he did as he was directed.

He unlocked the door and disappeared, and our hero entered the room.

As he crossed the threshold, he beheld Wilbur Beach seated at a barred window, reading; and when the young man turned and saw who had entered the room, he uttered an exclamation of surprise and joy, but did not rise.

"Well, young man," said the detective in a cheerful tone, "I have found you at last."

There followed a few words of explanation, and then Henry asked:

"How have you been treated while here?"

"Well; only that I have been a closely watched prisoner. And, between ourselves, I really pretended to be a little off, lest a greater wrong might be done me."

"Tell me your story, young man."

"First tell me your news."

"No; my news will keep. Tell me about yourself."

Wilbur Beach had but little to tell. He had received the note which Henry had recovered from the maid, and as the name Strouse was signed to it, he had determined to keep the appointment.

He was seized, gagged, put into a carriage, and conveyed to the asylum, and there he had been ever since the hour of his capture.

"And you have been well treated?"

"Yes. A man has been kept at my door every day, and a keeper has slept in my room every night, so as to prevent my escape. But I was laying low, intending to get away from here some day, and I made no complaint so long as I was well treated and well fed."

"All's well that ends well," said Henry; and he proceeded and told the young man of his doings and his final success.

"And Ethel is really alive and well?"

"Yes."

"And she will see me?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Some time within the next twelve hours."

Half an hour later the detective entered the presence of Leighton, and he said:

"I am done with you now, sir. Take my advice and make yourself very scarce."

"But the will?"

"The will is all right. It has never been in your possession, and I know just how great your forgeries have been. Your greatest crime, however, has been the kidnapping; and as you say you are a rich man, I'd advise you to get away to avoid criminal prosecution and civil suits for damages."

Five hours later the detective appeared at the house in Brooklyn. He met Ethel, and explanations followed.

"And I am to see Wilbur?" asked Ethel.

"That is for you to decide."

"You have brought him here with you?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"At my house."

"You will bring him here?"

"I will, if you so direct; or will you go to him?"

As the detective spoke he passed a look.

"I will go to him," said Ethel.

Within an hour and a half Ethel and Wilbur Beach met.

The detective arranged that they should meet at his house so that they could have a long talk undisturbed, and they did.

Further explanations are not needed. The detective had performed his part well. He was duly recognized, and, we may add, recompensed. Ethel came into possession of her estate, and a handsome present was made to Jack Sheppard, who had first led to the discovery of the strange mystery, and to-day he is the dear friend of Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Beach, as is also our hero Henry Brand.

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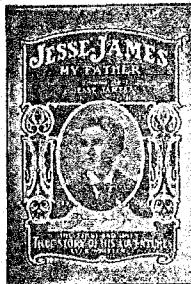
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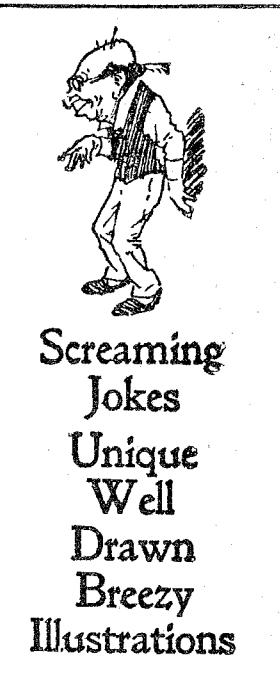
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